SUSPENSE and

argosy

Ray Bradbury
Victor Canning
ALFRED HITCHCOCK
David E. Walker

★

2 Brilliant Stories

MAY—2/6
Price in Australia and New Zealand

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argosy

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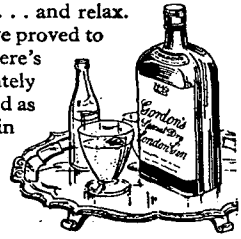

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WHAT SORT OF WOMAN ARE YOU?

Do you enjoy meeting people who are accomplished and elegant, amusing but informed?
Do you enjoy top fashion with taste—fiction from well-known or promising pens—beauty taken seriously—inspiration in cookery—a sense of achievement in knitting or needlework—the joy of being a successful hostess? . . . then you will enjoy

Woman's **Journal**

ON SALE EVERY MONTH 3/- A FLEETWAY MAGAZINE

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WE'VE always nourished a nostalgic passion for blood-and-thunder comics, ever since the days when they were forbidden reading and had to be kept under a loose floorboard.

Finding one recently under a loose floorboard in the office—how can it have got there?—we were delighted to see that the essential matter of comics hasn't changed at all in the last thirty years—true, there are now atom bombs, and the police cars are a bit more streamlined, but the basic ingredients remain the same.

Take the comic we found, for instance. (*Mem.* Could it belong to the Editor? Or did one of the painters leave it behind?) The lead story deals with *The Hot Walk Through the Everlasting Fires*—stirring stuff, and absolutely true to form. Four American scientists plumb the unknown depths of the earth and are captured by a race of octopus-men. (We're sorry we can't reproduce the strip illustrations but experienced readers will have no trouble in imagining them.)

"Head for that jungle, we've scared them by taking off our helmets!"

"What was that noise?"

"It's a mammoth!!! Let's get out of here."

"I'll stop it with a stick of my special explosive—the nitrogenulene."

But before Jesse could throw, another mammoth appeared—a white one.

"Those mammoths are too busy fighting to notice us. Let's get away."

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Some time later: " Look over there! Flocks of sheep! "

" This isn't a sheep, it looks like a hairy caterpillar. It might be good for eating, let's find out." (Rather them than us, for the sheep has six legs and looks very morose.)

" Hmmm! This meat is delicious."

Suddenly: " Look out! Someone's trying to net us! We've been caught by one-eyed giants! Their clothes are made from caterpillars' skins . . ."

Next week: The party is reduced to three men. Who drops out?

(This reduction hardly seems surprising: shared out among the mammoths, the octomen, the caterpillars, and the giants, you wouldn't expect there to be much left of our four brave friends.)

In the same comic is a spy story about a hunchbacked British secret agent: his hump is really a container for a wireless transmitter, needless to say. This week he's spotted by von Laubnitz. *Next week: Battle with the Graf Spee.*

Captain Nemo of the *Nautilus* is still going strong, we're pleased to find, though bang up to date with a submerging aquatic aerodrome.

How many revs a minute
Would Jules Verne turn in his grave
If he saw the variations he'd given rise to
In life on the ocean wave?

There is also The Kid at Barefist Camp, The Sky Pirates, Dozy Danny, Scruffy, and Lanky Franky. But unquestionably our favourite character is Lonely Larry who, clad in a Garth-type leopardskin, lives on a Galapagos Island with Percy the Penguin. He and Percy are nearly swamped by a tidal wave this week and have a lot of trouble with octopus-weeds (it's interesting how octopi haunt the imaginations of strip-creators) and escape only to fall into the claws of a giant crab.

" Look at the size of the brute! It must weigh a ton! "

A huge iguana distracts the crab's attention. A fearful fight rages. " The crab has killed the iguana! Now it's after me!! Ah, that was close! "

Larry is up on some rocks now. No sign of Percy the Penguin.

" I must get rid of that crab. There isn't room on this island for both of us! " What about Percy?

Next week: The strange struggle between Lonely Larry and the spider-crab.

Any Argosy reader who'd like us to switch from stories to strips, kindly return your copy with a cross in the square at the foot of the page.

Excuse us while we replace the loose board . . .

JOHN SILVER

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DEATH IN STUDIO ONE

It was the cruellest thing in the world—and the world loved it

BY WILFRED McNEILLY

DEAD on cue for once, Camera Three tracked in on Gogarty's gong. Two panned with The Voice of Inquiry himself. One swung from the caption-holder and failed, for a change, to run over Martin's foot with his dolly. The seamed, knobbly face of Gogarty himself filled the monitor and another session of *Watch This Space* had endured its opening with no more than the usual panic.

Martin, the floor manager, was backed against a flat for the following *Happy Daze*, sweating gently into his head-set and watching with worried eyes the tangled skein of cables on the floor, the waiting interviewees, and the gadget boys.

It looked as if it was going to be all right. But then it had better be. One more snarl like the rehearsal business and ex-officer, ex-salesman Martin would be ex-floor manager Martin. As if it was his fault that a lighting goon had dropped a 2,000 watt-er within inches of the precious Gogarty head. A pity it had missed. It had been Gogarty's fault anyhow, rushing late to rehearsal so the lighting goon had to use a distant stick to shift the lamp instead of climbing into the maze of girders above the studio and doing it by hand.

When Gogarty interviewed no one interrupted, no one dared breathe. It was no wonder the clamp on the stick slipped. Who did Gogarty think he was? Still, it had been good to see the expression on his face when the bulb went off. Probably in a reserved occupation during the war.

The first subject was real Gogarty meat. He could pick them all right.

A frail little woman with a scatterbrained scheme for bringing world peace and easing tensions. Gogarty sat there, drawing her out, exposing her poor little pretensions with such an air of urbane sympathy that she gushed even more ridiculously. Only the camera, and twenty million viewers, caught Gogarty's

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occasional sidelong glances that were almost conspiratorial winks.

"You and I know," those glances said, "that's she's talking the most unutterable poppycock. But let's keep her at it. There may be better still to come."

It was the cruellest thing in the world and the world loved it. Even the mugs themselves loved it, leaving the studio without realising how they'd been fooled.

There was a film star next and Henderson took her. Film stars were there to puff their next film, not to be made fools of. Their agents took good care of that.

There was a film clip—nice little piece about water-ski-ing—then Gogarty would be back again.

The head-set crackled.

"Track in a bit slower, Three. It's not a race."

Three's cable was going to foul One's dolly. Martin cleared it just in time. Floor manager! He'd be sweeping the place next. That would suit Gogarty. He was laying for him all right, ever since the Lady Smith debacle. The blame had been Gogarty's, but they'd pinned it on Martin because floor managers didn't talk back, or weren't supposed to. Lord, for the war again and Gogarty in his platoon.

And now there was another panic. Was the next mug shivering? No . . . caught his pocket in the door handle. Simple thing, floor manager's fault. "Door handles will be so arranged that they do not catch in the pockets of . . ."

And this mug was a right ripe one. Walrus moustache, terribly neat. Big, thick glasses, almost like a disguise. The fantastic type that Gogarty just loved. He'd have him out and wriggling on a pin in just forty seconds flat.

Martin's ears pricked up suddenly. This was not going quite to plan.

"And now we have Mr. Horace Twigg, from Sidcup," rolled Gogarty's rich voice with the spurious Dublin accent and the even more spurious friendly warmth.

"No," said the mug, "I'm afraid you haven't got that quite right."

The monitor showed Gogarty's astonishment for an instant, then it was on the mug again.

He was peeling off his bushy moustache and taking off his thick glasses and pulling a pistol from his pocket.

He had a thin, intense face and long, beautiful hands. Martin remembered those hands. Where had he seen them before?

"My name is Ransom . . . and this pistol is loaded, which I shall demonstrate."

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He spoke in a tight, suppressed voice but he turned the gun up quite casually and blasted a baby spot from the gantry. Glass showered over Gogarty. The explosion held everyone spell-bound in the one split second in which the gun still pointed harmlessly up and the man might have been rushed.

" I must warn everyone that my intentions are serious and that someone will inevitably be hurt, possibly killed, if any attempt is made to interfere. Also, if this programme fails to continue on the air I will not be responsible for the consequences."

Someone in the control room was finding it hard to keep up with events. " Jeez, this isn't in the script," Martin heard. Then, " Switch him off." " Suppose he shoots? " " *Switch him off.*" " The monitor . . ." " For any favour get that maniac out of there, we're overrunning already."

Martin almost laughed. Overrunning! That was all they could think of, those little men with their stopwatch minds.

But the picture stayed on the monitor which was well within Ransom's view as was almost everything else in the studio—except Martin, pressed against the flat of *Happy Daze*. If he slipped round the corner of that flat . . .

" Mr. Gogarty," Ransom's voice went on. " Or would you prefer me to call you by your real name—Albert Huggs? You may recall that a year ago I appeared with you on this programme, demonstrating an invention of my own, the Ransom Space Communicator, designed for instantaneous translation into any language, terrestrial or astral, of any communication . . ."

" Of course, of course, to be sure." Gogarty was trying to hide the quaver in his voice. " Very interesting it was. But would you not be more comfortable without that gun, Mr. Ransom? "

Gogarty's face was grey as a winter's morning and there was a curious yellowness about his eyes.

" You mocked me on that programme, Mr. Gogarty," said Ransom, gun still aligned on the interviewer's belly. " You mocked me and you mocked my invention. As a result I lost my employment, my wife, and the respect of my friends. I became a laughing-stock because you twisted my every meaning against me."

The head-set was howling at Martin, " Do something. Get that crackpot away from there."

Martin was already behind the flat and heading for the ladder leading to the light gantries.

Gogarty was fighting a rearguard action.

" You . . . you, yourself, volunteered for the programme. You . . . you didn't have to come."

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"I was approached. I was promised that I should be interviewed in a proper and serious manner. I did not expect to be treated as a crackpot."

Gogarty tried to bluster. "Now listen, Mr. Ransom, you got a fair crack of the whip. If you seemed like a crackpot, maybe it was because you were one. Now, I think it's time you . . ."

He had half risen. Now he half sat down. That gun was quite exceptionally still.

Martin was on the gantry. He had a stick now, a ten-foot pole with a clamp on one end which could be operated by a handle at the other, in the manner of an apple-tree pruner. He bellied his way along the girders, not missing a word of what went on below, delighting in every delirious moment.

"It is your contention then, that the opportunity to answer is adequate justification for skilled and biased interrogation by loaded question? So be it. Mr. Gogarty, I am going to interview you . . ."

And this he did. In his cold, dispassionate voice he remarked that he had paid a detective agency to inquire into Gogarty's past, from his birth in a Liverpool slum, through reform school boyhood, desertion from the Army . . .

"From the Pay Corps, I understand, with a substantial sum of Pay Corps money . . ."

Twenty million viewers saw and heard their idol torn relentlessly to shreds. A controller watched his evening's schedule overrun hopelessly and Martin crawled farther out along the gantries. He was lowering the stick now. His plan was quite simple. He would seize Ransom's wrist with the clamp—or the gun if he was lucky.

"But not before he's finished with Gogarty. Oh, the swine! Oh, the fat-gutted pig with his high and mighty ways! Deserted—from the Pay Corps."

He could not conveniently think of anything lower.

Gogarty had shrunk away in his seat, a shapeless, leaking balloon. And still the indictment went on.

"I shall not name your mistresses from this establishment since I understand that at least two of them were coerced by your threats . . ."

"It's not true. They loved me."

It was Gogarty's last gasp of defiance.

"Loved you? Who could love you? Do you even love yourself?"

Martin's soul exulted in the utter contempt of Ransom's words. But there must be an end now. The clamp was only two or three feet from the gun.

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"A coward dies many deaths," Ransom intoned. "A brave man but one."

He lunged the pistol in a swordsman sort of jab at Gogarty's belly. "Prepare to become television's first martyr."

Gogarty jerked back and then slowly turned over forward, his eyes rolling up to show the whites in a quite horrific manner which was, happily, caught by Camera Three and retailed to the waiting twenty million—now augmented by the twenty million from The Other Channel who had sensed that something was Up.

Martin lunged with the stick and deftly seized the gun. Ransom did not resist the pressure of the clamp.

"It's all right," he said calmly. "It wasn't loaded anyway. I had only one bullet."

There was a regular hurly-burly then.

Everyone was very brave and Ransom was seized from a dozen points at once. The Controller was dictating a memo to be circulated to all departments. Interviewees in future would be searched for arms . . .

It was quite a while before anyone noticed that Gogarty was dead—in a physical sense, that is. He had been dead for about ten minutes so far as television was concerned. There was some argument at the autopsy as to whether he had died of fear, rage, or chagrin.

His heart in any case was very bad—though no doctor was needed for that discovery, Martin thought.

No one congratulated Martin on his skill, nerve, and judgment. After all it was a floor manager's job to see that things ran smoothly.

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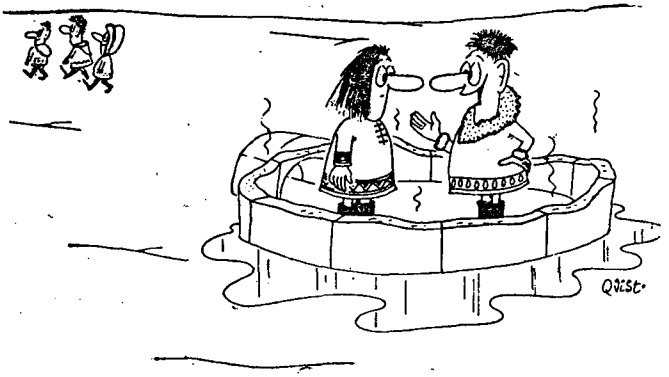

"Our housewarming party was quite a success, don't you think?"

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Francis Fytton, married, two sons, is a highly mobile member of the Vintage Sports-Car Club, and owns a 1939 *Alfa-Romeo (n.b., enthusiasts, it's a* 2.3 6c *"Mille Miglia.") He has fond associations with Alvises; he used to own one.*

THIRD PARTY RISK

BY FRANCIS FYTTON

THAT Monday morning Mr. District Attorney found the Hampstead air too chilly. When Godfrey Gascon pressed the starter there was a sound as of a lawnmower being disembowelled by a chance stone. Then a plaintive plop as the battery gave up its task.

Godfrey Gascon—G.G. to his friends—raised the bonnet and removed the gargantuan starting-handle from the clips that held it to the bulkhead. He began to swing the engine. There was snow upon the ground. Nevertheless, as Gascon literally warmed to his task, he removed first his bowler—which was of the fur-bearing variety and so called a Coke—then his British Warm, and finally his drab, doublebreasted jacket.

After labouring for many minutes without result, he tore open the constricting starch of his collar and loosened the blue tie with its encircled letter V: proud emblem of the Vintage Sports-Car Club.

Mr. District Attorney, who was known to resent being left out in the cold, glowered at his master out of monstrous headlamps.

"Horse, now will you let me buy you a new car?" said Deirdre as she passed him.

"No."

"A new battery?"

"Do shut up."

"At least let me give you a tow."

"Oh, drop dead."

"Then why not switch on the ignition? I'm told it works wonders, even with the most antediluvian automobiles."

Deirdre walked to her own car, high-stepping like a thorough-

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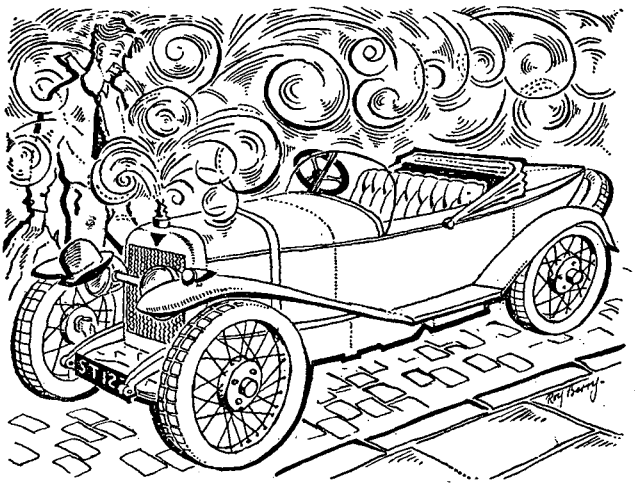

bred that has been stabled in a shippen. This gait suited her well: she was a slender girl with eyes the colour of cornflowers and hair the colour of corn—a combination that never failed to pierce Gascon's heart afresh whenever he looked upon it after an interval of more than five minutes. Now the heartbreak was particularly poignant, for Deirdre only walked in this way when she was really angry and trying not to show it.

So Gascon tried not to watch as she opened the door of her fabulous Sapristi Sprint Speciale Spyder, whose aerodynamic bodywork in Italian Racing Red stained the snow like a blood-stain. The mere association of ideas caused Gascon to shudder, though by now he was sweating freely.

Deirdre sank gracefully into the low leather seat and swung her legs high as she pivoted into the driving position. She thus presented a picture of sheer nylon, framed in frills, from knees to ankles. Deirdre's legs were her best feature: when angry, she used them like rapiers.

Very deliberately she pressed the Sapristi's starter. At once, three hundred horses responded with a snarl of sublime power to the bidding of her fingertip. With an ostentatious display of wheelspin, she spurted grit-laden snow over Gascon and Mr. District Attorney as the Sapristi roared uphill. All that remained was a fragrance of exotic perfume and hundred-octane petrol.

When he was sure that she was out of sight, Gascon checked Mr. District Attorney's ignition switch. Sure enough, he had turned it off to preserve the weakened battery before getting the

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starting-handle, and forgotten to switch on again before swinging the engine.

Surreptitiously, he switched on. He had reckoned, however, without Deirdre's cunning, for now she swept back down the road, and stopped beside Mr. District Attorney with a purr of brake-pads upon discs.

"So I was right."

"So you were right."

"Say you're sorry."

"I'm not."

"Temper."

"Would you mind removing that bloodstained crouching killer you call a car? Neither Mr. District Attorney nor I find it very amusing."

She swept on with a triumphant toot upon the Sapristi's windtones. Gascon pushed his own horn button, but the battery was now so far gone that the ancient Klaxon could manage no more than a tired hiccup.

Left to himself, Gascon gave Mr. District Attorney a reassuring pat on the scuttle. "It was a case of love me, love my car, old fellow," he said aloud.

That was not really true, honesty compelled him to admit. It was a case of having a wife who earned so much more money than her husband. And who wanted to share her wealth, he reflected dolefully.

It would have been more tactful of Deirdre to pretend that their income brackets were identical. Being an advertising copywriter was surely no more skilled than being an insurance underwriter. A copywriter gambled the client's money, the underwriter gambled his own. Consequently the copywriter was insured against failure while, paradoxically, the underwriter was not. He reflected sadly on the ironic pattern that keeps the wheels of commerce turning.

Then he remembered that he must get Mr. District Attorney's turning if he were to play any part in the pattern that day. This time Mr. District Attorney, his cylinders well lubricated by Gascon's previous work on the starting-handle, burst into pulsating life at the first swing.

"You," said Gascon, addressing his car very seriously, "are my one true love."

That was not true either, but there had been a time when Deirdre's cuttingly-outspoken preference for contemporary cars had caused Gascon to voice doubts about the wisdom of their marriage.

Mr. District Attorney had been born exactly thirty years

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previously into the Alvis family. He was thus an exact contemporary of Gascon. He was a sports version of that fabled species, the Twelve-Fifty, with an enormous external exhaust-pipe that unwound its serpentine coils down the entire length of the body, and curious rear decking, beneath which was housed the spare wheel. This style of body was known to the coach-builders as "duck's back," and to the irreverent as "D.A." —and by an association of more polite ideas the Alvis had become Mr. District Attorney.

Gascon now went through the procedure, complex as the cockpit drill of a pilot, necessary before moving off. He twisted the screw choke gently, thus reducing the gush of petrol through the carburettor; advanced the ignition, so that the irregular firing of the four cylinders assumed a pattern approaching regularity; and closed the manual throttle until the needle on the tachometer fell from a blaring thousand revolutions per minute to a mere tickover of five hundred.

To calm himself, he lit a cigarette while giving the engine a few unnecessary blips with the accelerator. The resultant roars went echoing over north-west London to give the citizens in Golders Green the impression that a guided missile was being launched. Then he saw that the cigarette was one of Deirdre's and threw it away.

It was ten past ten: he was already ten minutes late for the office. Hastily accelerating, he blared up the hill into Heath Street, across the lights by the tube station, and roared up the steep and twisting hill beyond. An exhilarating blast of air reached him over the windscreen as he passed Jack Straw's Castle and opened up across Hampstead Heath. This was not Gascon's shortest route to the City; merely his favourite.

Several people turned their heads to watch Mr. District Attorney. There was nothing unusual in that; Gascon accepted it as admiration for a "real car." One or two even waved and shouted. Gascon waved back and gave them a cheery good morning.

As he neared The Spaniards, Gascon began to exercise pressure upon the brake pedal—never Mr. District Attorney's most endearing feature—for here the road narrowed and bent dramatically. He blared the horn, happy to find the Klaxon once more in good voice: even the short run had recharged the battery to some effect. Past that danger point, he opened out again and savaged the bends to Highgate, revelling in the superb road-holding on a good surface.

A halt at the lights of Highgate Village and more heads were turned. There could be no doubt about it: these were not looks

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of admiration. People went on their way pointing and laughing. It seemed that the whole world must be in league with Deirdre in deriding Mr. District Attorney. Gascon ignored them, looking loftily over the bonnet.

The lights changed to green and he turned right, down Highgate West Hill, changed into third, the engine protesting against the pull of gravity, the skeletal trees of Parliament Hill Fields fleeting upwards. Then it was Kentish Town and an end to exhilarating prospects; slush and sludge all the way to the City. And more amused glances.

Taking his customary short cut through Smithfield, chiefly for the view of the Tudor gatehouse of St. Bartholomew-the-Great, Gascon found himself baulked by a backing lorry. He hauled on the massive handbrake and prepared to wait. At once he found himself engulfed in steam. Clouds billowed from the bonnet. Was Mr. District Attorney overheating in cold weather? Gascon was gripped by fear; had the header tank frozen overnight? Was the cylinder head already cracked?

A big bummaree from the meat market provided the solution.

"Do you always coddle your car like that, mate? You aren't 'arf making the old gal sweat."

Gascon put a leg over the side—Messrs. Cross and Ellis had dispensed with such refinements as a door for the driver—and ran to the radiator. Through the now subsiding steam, he saw that the blunt brass nose was still swathed in his British Warm. When he removed that he found his jacket beneath—soaked in steam. His bowler was jammed rakishly over one of the headlamps.

The big bummaree was roaring with laughter. Gascon looked at him pugnaciously, but he was a very big bummaree and his fellow-bummarees came crowding to see the fun. So Gascon said, "Thanks, mate," and resumed his outer clothing. Disputes with Deirdre always made him absentminded. But at least he had remembered to replace the starting-handle.

After allowing time for the radiator's angry passions to subside, he restarted the engine and drove sedately through Smithfield until he came to one of those little streets almost beneath the dome of St. Paul's. Parking Mr. District Attorney among the resplendent Rolls-Royces and Rovers, Gascon entered the dingiest doorway and took a weary and wheezing lift to the sixth floor. Here, as a green-edged brass plate informed visitors, were to be found the London headquarters of

Gascon, Gascon, Gascon, Gascon & Gascon,
Marine & Motor Underwriters,
100, *Bracegirdle Street, E.C.*
also in Amsterdam, Hamburg, Boston, and Manila.

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Frivolous-minded people sometimes asked Gascon which Gascon he was. When he replied "None," they thought he was being frivolous. But he spoke the truth.

The firm had been founded by his five great-uncles—stout Victorian merchant-adventurers in the most literal sense—all of whom had died bachelors, leaving the business to a nephew, Albert Gascon, father of Godfrey.

Albert Gascon had been more interested in covering bets than policies and had gradually sold four-fifths of his interest to a solid City family named Snapdragon—who took insurance very seriously indeed.

Albert had, however, left one legacy of his City career, which was the extension of *Gascon, Gascon, Gascon, Gascon & Gascon*'s interest to motor insurance. A pioneer of motoring, Albert Gascon had once owned an Alvis of even earlier vintage than Mr. District Attorney. His driving had been distinguished more for dash than discretion and his interest in motor insurance dated from the day when, after a long succession of expensive accidents, he had found himself unable to insure his car with any company but his own. The firm had been losing money on motor insurance ever since.

The youngest Snapdragon had suggested the firm might now withdraw from the field, but Snapdragon senior felt it would be unfair to the motoring world if so well established a firm of underwriters were to show lack of confidence in the future of the internal combustion engine. "It might even have serious repercussions in Amsterdam, Hamburg, Boston, and Manila," said the senior Snapdragon. So the firm continued to cover motor policies, albeit with increasing reluctance.

It was the scion of the Snapdragons, by name Sydney, who now greeted Gascon as he thrust aside the ancient swing doors. "Morning, Horse."

"Morning, Egg."

Besides being pale, stout, and pompous, Sydney Snapdragon was prematurely bald. Now he stopped and laid a detaining hand upon Gascon's arm.

It was plain to see that he was deeply concerned. The smooth expanse of skin that began above his eyebrows and ended at his collar-stud showed odd wrinkles.

"Er—Horse."

"Yes, Egg?"

"Has the lift broken down again?"

"No, why?"

"I thought you must have been running upstairs."

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"What gave you that idea?"

"Well, your collar's all burst open and you're sweating like a bull. It's soaked through your jacket and your overcoat."

"It's a very cold morning and I thought I'd get some exercise," said Gascon icily.

"Has that old crock of yours let you down again?"

"My vintage car is in excellent form, thank you," said Gascon. His manner had now become positively glacial, as it always did when Mr. District Attorney's honour was called in question. He was about to pass when Sydney Snapdragon again detained him.

"I wish you wouldn't, Horse."

"Wouldn't what?"

"Dash about looking so dishevelled. These things are noticed by the City. It might give rise to—speculation."

"You mean I might start a panic at Lloyds because my collar's burst open?"

"It's possible. A firm of the standing of *Gascon, Gascon, Gascon & Gascon* must . . ."

"Watch it, Snapdragon. You've missed out Great-Uncle Henry. Remember the City has its eyes upon us. One more such slip and the Stock Exchange will be buzzing with rumours that the partnership is breaking up. I wouldn't be surprised if the Bank Rate fell before evening."

"By the way, Horse, the senior partner was asking for you. He wants a word with you."

The senior partner, Stanley Snapdragon, was in fact the father of Sydney Snapdragon, but in business hours he was always "the senior partner" to his son.

"Oh," said Gascon, suddenly depressed, "I'll go in right away."

But he went first to his own office. It was the last and least of the cubicles abutting the dark and dusty corridor. First came the office of Simon Snapdragon, father of Stanley and grandfather of Sydney. The head of the house of Snapdragon had officially retired from an active part in the business upon reaching the age of eighty, but he still looked in "to keep an eye on things."

The next office was occupied by his younger son, Stephen. Stephen Snapdragon was a man of fifty or thereabouts, with an expensive complexion.

This morning he appeared to be sniffing the water in a flower vase on his desk. He had removed the flowers for this purpose and the wet stalks were resting upon an immaculate blotter. Only Gascon was not deceived by this apparent passion for botany.

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"So that's where you keep the stuff now," he said, opening the door.

Stephen Snapdragon made a guilt-stricken motion, which was at once replaced by a look of relief when he had identified his visitor.

"I wish you wouldn't do things like that," he said peevishly. He raised the vase to his lips and gulped greedily.

"Don't the flowers spoil the taste?" asked Gascon.

"That's what they think, so they don't examine the vases any more," said Stephen. "But I fooled 'em. Replaced the real flowers with good plastic imitations. Can't taste a thing."

"A masterly move."

Stephen took another pull at the vase. It was evident that the contents were heightening his powers of perception. He looked at Gascon with increasing interest.

"That must have been a hell of a jag you were on," said Stephen. "Is that beer on your suit? You must have got into the barrel. I once did that. Here, have a hair of the dog."

Remembering his coming interview with the head of the firm, Gascon took the proffered vase. He drained it. The effect was rather like that of the carbon monoxide he had once inhaled when Mr. District Attorney's hood was erected and the side screens in place.

"What is it?" asked Gascon, when he could speak again.

"American vodka. Doesn't smell, y'see, and it's as clear as water."

Stephen took another vase from the window. "Have another?"

"Sure you can spare it?"

"Of course, my dear fellow. I'm going to fill the place with flowers. My brother encourages my interest in botany. He says it's time I had a hobby."

"If you're sure he won't smell my breath, I'd love another. I'm just going in to see him."

"And the best of British luck."

Gascon laid down the vase. "Well, thanks for the natural history lesson. I'd better be going."

"Delighted, my dear chap."

Stephen picked up a flower bowl from his desk and absent-mindedly drained it without first removing the artificial pansies. Several stuck to his glasses, giving him the look of a dissipated cherub. He began to blow them away. He was quite happy.

The sign upon his office read, *Stephen Snapdragon: Trans-Atlantic Transactions.* The next office, Sydney's, carried the curt message, *Asia.* After that came Gascon's cubicle, still bearing his father's plate with the legend, *Horseless Carriages.*

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Attempts had been made, notably by Sydney, to have this replaced, but Gascon had insisted upon its retention, taking his stand upon tradition. It was, he pointed out with perfect truth, the only original nameplate remaining in the firm.

Within his own office, Gascon hastily re-attached his collar and straightened his tie. Then he grabbed a couple of policies at random from his desk and went to the office of Stanley Snapdragon, the senior partner. The door bore a plate with the inscription, *Affairs at Large*, presumably to indicate that the senior Snapdragon's interests were all-embracing. Gascon knocked dutifully.

"You may enter," said a consciously hearty voice.

Gascon availed himself of that permission. A student of the reception techniques of Hitler and Mussolini, Stanley Snapdragon had his desk at the far end of the room from the door in order that visitors should walk the maximum distance before reaching him. He also had a desk lamp arranged so as to cast light on his visitor's features while leaving his own in shadow.

"Sit down, my boy, sit down," boomed Stanley Snapdragon. "Manage to get a few rounds of golf over the weekend?"

"No, sir. I don't play."

"No, of course, rugger's your game, isn't it?"

"I don't play that, either."

"Well, what did you do with your weekend?"

"I tinkered with the car."

"Ah yes, that old car of yours. Tell me, Gascon, do you make many contacts through it?"

"No, sir, but I make a lot of friends."

"No doubt, no doubt. I say, Gascon old boy, you're wet."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing personal. I mean, your jacket's sopping. How did it get that way?"

"Well, sir, you know how keen I am on cold baths?"

"Are you really? Keeps a man young and fit, I always say. Never start a day without a cold tub and a rough towel, myself."

"I do without the towel, sir. I get dry by doing Swedish exercises."

"Fine, my boy, fine."

"And this morning I spent rather longer than usual splashing about in my cold bath, discovered how late I was, and had to cut short the exercises. I must have got dressed before I was properly dry . . ."

"So that's why you're late, eh? I was meaning to talk to you about it. Punctuality's a fine thing. Makes a good impression in

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the City. Besides, it's your business as much as mine; so it's your own time you're wasting."

Gascon wished that it were so. Not only had Stanley Snapdragon the power to make him feel like an office boy, but at a very conservative estimate four-fifths of the capital was in Snapdragon hands. And so strict was the senior partner's control of the family affairs that no other Snapdragon had more than a nominal holding.

"I realise that, sir."

"Well, I'm glad to see you've brought the right policy with you. I want to have a word about it."

Unfortunately Gascon was holding two policies. Stanley Snapdragon might mean either. Gascon took a chance. "I've been meaning to talk with you about the Trepolpen Motor Hire Company's case, sir. I'm not at all satisfied with the Third Party claim in regard to the straying goat. I mean, it must have been producing cheese for the whole of Cornwall . . ."

"That's not the policy I was speaking of," said Stanley Snapdragon irritably. "And I don't feel it's your place to query our own assessor's estimate of the animal's worth, as it was being transported by our client at the time and we are trying to recover its value. The matter upon which I wish to consult you is the insurance policy on your wife's car, which is now due for renewal."

"Oh, that policy," said Gascon uneasily. He was holding it in his left hand.

"I have subjected it to close scrutiny, together with the relevant file, for the purpose of considering the figure at which we might quote renewal for the coming year," said Stanley Snapdragon in his most formal manner. "And I have come to the conclusion that it is impossible for us to accept the risk."

"You can't mean that."

"I do mean that. Your wife's driving record—I say this without in any way denigrating her character as a woman—is not, to say the least of it, unblemished. In the period under review, she had five accidents involving damage to Third Party property, four accidents of a minor nature involving damage to the car, three convictions for exceeding the speed limit in restricted areas, and twelve for obstruction by parking. What have you to say to that, Gascon?"

"The roads have been very crowded, sir."

"They will be less crowded now, Gascon."

"You mean that if you refuse to renew Deirdre's policy, no one else will do so?"

"You know how closely the City watches the affairs of

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Gascon, Gascon, Gascon, Gascon & Gascon, don't you, Gascon?"

"Full house," said Gascon.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I mean you have the five Gascons all present and correct, sir."

"This is not a time for frivolity, Gascon."

"Is that your last word, sir?"

"It is, Gascon."

"Then I take it you have no objection to my ringing round the other motor insurance companies with a view to getting cover for my wife's car?"

"You may save yourself the trouble, Gascon. I have already done so, quoting your wife's case as a hypothetical instance, of course. I took this step in order that you should feel there was no element of personal prejudice in my decision. I may say that every company was unanimous in refusing such a risk. Your wife's driving record is such as to arouse reluctance in the mind of any underwriter. When that record is taken in conjunction with a vehicle whose specification involves twelve cylinders, jointly developing three hundred brake horse power —I quote the net and not the gross figure—and a claimed terminal velocity of one hundred and eighty miles per hour, assessed at a value of six thousand pounds, the risk involved ceases to be a valid business venture."

"Well, put like that, it does seem a bit much," admitted Gascon.

"Frankly, Gascon, I should have thought you would be happier to see your wife quit of such a car."

"I would," admitted Gascon. "To be quite honest, I don't draw a carefree breath while she's at the wheel. But—may I speak in confidence, sir? It's this way. I seem a dull dog to Deirdre. I mean to say, I'm an underwriter, she's a copywriter: she earns about three times as much as I do. She needs a bit of glamour, and the only thing I can do is to see she gets it through her Sapristi."

"I'm sorry, Gascon; much as I would like to help you in the matter of your marriage, I can see no issue."

"I think I can," said Gascon, upon whose wits the vodka was working wonders. "If I remember rightly, the Act relating to motor insurance doesn't stipulate that Third Party cover is essential if the sum of £15,000 is deposited with the Accountant-General."

"That is so," agreed Stanley Snapdragon. "But as far as I know, it has never been done."

"Do you think it's adequate cover? I mean, do you think that

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even Deirdre in a Sapristi is likely to cause more than £15,000 worth of devastation?"

"I should think," said Stanley Snapdragon, "that £15,000 should cover even your wife's propensity for destruction."

"Right," said Gascon. "Then supposing I pay £15,000 to *Gascon, Gascon, Gascon, Gascon & Gascon* and you issue Deirdre with Third Party cover?"

"Why not pay it direct to the Accountant-General?"

"Because Deirdre might tumble to what I was doing."

"Have you the sum of £15,000 available?"

"No, but I've got my share in the business. That's worth £15,000, isn't it? And I suppose you could keep me on as a clerk at a salary, so no one need know of the change."

"That would be highly irregular," said Stanley Snapdragon. "It would mean a special form of policy for one thing."

"Wilson could draw it up in ten minutes," said Gascon. Wilson was the chief clerk and a wizard in all matters pertaining to insurance.

"It's not so simple as that, Gascon. It would mean creating a precedent. I am opposed to precedents. A sound insurance business depends upon established principles, not precedents. No, I am opposed to it."

"As a partner I am entitled to place the proposition before the other partners and have the matter put to a vote, am I not?"

"If you insist."

"Then I do insist, sir. The matter means a great deal to me."

"Very well," said Stanley Snapdragon reluctantly. "I suppose we'd better get it settled right away. Then we can all get down to serious business."

He began ringing the offices of the Snapdragons and within a few minutes the clan was assembled.

"Perhaps you would like to explain the nature of your proposition, Gascon," said Stanley Snapdragon, when he had made sure that his father had his hearing-aid switched on, that his brother was in a condition to follow the proceedings, and that his son was taking notes. "But I must say, since I understand that the matter is to be put to a vote, that I am wholeheartedly opposed to it."

Gascon obediently expounded his proposition as persuasively as possible.

When he was finished, Stanley Snapdragon spoke. Taking his stand upon his authority, he reminded the family in whose hands the money was concentrated.

"There is just one thing I would like to say before we have a show of hands," said Gascon. He raised his voice so that old

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Simon Snapdragon—an ardent admirer of Deirdre—could not fail to hear. "This car means a great deal to my wife and I would do anything to ensure her happiness. It's in the nature of a hobby with her, and we all know how important hobbies are to our wellbeing. Some of us have very different hobbies." He paused significantly and stared hard at Stephen Snapdragon.

"Botany," proceeded Gascon, glaring ruthlessly at Stephen who returned a weak smile. "This car is equally necessary to my wife. As I've said before, I would do anything to ensure her happiness. Anything at all."

There was a taut silence broken by Stanley Snapdragon, upon whose ears the significance of this appeal had been wasted.

"Let's get down to the vote then," said Stanley. "You, Sydney?"

"I agree with the senior partner," said Sydney, looking dutifully at his father.

"Father?" said Stanley.

"Eh? Oh well, if the gal wants to have the car and he wants her to have it, why not? Pretty gal, lovely legs. Car shows 'em off a treat when she gets in and out. I'm in favour of accepting Gascon's proposal."

"Stephen?" said Stanley Snapdragon in a voice charged with menace.

Stephen Snapdragon met Gascon's eye in a silent appeal for mercy. There was none.

"I agree with Dad," said Stephen. "Do no harm and the partnership's cheap at the price."

"Which leaves me with the deciding vote," said Gascon cheerfully. "And, of course, I'm in favour of my own proposition."

"Motion carried," said Stanley Snapdragon gruffly. "Very well, Gascon. I'm outvoted and forced to accept your absurd proposal. I will instruct Wilson to draw up the necessary documents. We can complete the formalities tomorrow. But I would advise you to think seriously, very seriously indeed, before taking the final and irrevocable step. Perhaps you'd better have the rest of the day off in order to think it over."

"Thank you, sir," said Gascon. "It will enable me to complete some other business, but I doubt if it will affect my decision."

Deirdre arrived at the flat that evening in a state of unconcealed elation. Evidently their quarrel of the morning was forgotten and forgiven.

"Darling," she said, "I have such wonderful news."

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"Oh," said Gascon, who had been moodily studying an advertisement he had inserted in an evening newspaper for the sale of Mr. District Attorney. "What is it?"

"I've got the Sapristi account."

"Is that another bill?"

"No, darling, it means that my agency is going to handle the advertising for Sapristi cars, thanks to yours truly."

"How on earth did you do that?"

"Well, darling, you know I've been writing articles in the motoring magazines about my Sapristi? I've been sending the cuttings to Igotta Sapristi, the manufacturer. He became interested and wrote to me. When he discovered that I was actually an advertising copywriter, he approached the agency and suggested that they should handle Sapristi advertising in the English-speaking countries, but on condition that I wrote all the copy."

"Congratulations," said Gascon heavily.

"So I can sell the thing at last."

"What's that?"

"I'm going to sell the Sapristi. The head of the agency is going to buy one for prestige purposes and I shall be able to drive that if I want to. Not that I expect I shall want to drive it much. A high-powered car like the Sapristi is a bit of a handful for a girl."

"But I thought you were devoted to it."

"That's what I wanted you to think. I suppose you arranged to sell your share of the business so that I could keep the Sapristi."

"How did you find that out?" asked Gascon hollowly.

"I was making inquiries about insuring the new Sapristi for our chairman, and naturally I tried to get on to you, Horse. But the girl on the switchboard told me you were out, so I was put through to Wilson. When I began talking about insuring a Sapristi, he thought I was asking about renewing the cover for mine."

"So he spilt the beans?"

"Quite unintentionally. He didn't know it was to be kept from me. Stanley Snapdragon told me that."

"The rat."

"Oh no. He tried to be discreet; but when I heard what Wilson had to say, I went round and made him confess. So then I knew there was no need for me to keep the Sapristi."

"What do you mean—need?"

"Well, dear, you are very fond of Mr. District Attorney, aren't you? I mean there was a time when you nearly had to choose

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between us. I felt it was only by letting you keep the car that I could be sure you'd marry me."

"That was a long time ago."

"Wives never forget rivals."

"You can't talk about Mr. District Attorney as a rival. It's absurd."

"It didn't seem so to me. I might have been happier if it had been another woman. Then I'd have known how to deal with the situation. As it was I adopted the same methods."

"I don't follow."

"Well, if you'd been keen on another girl, I'd have tried to make you jealous by showing affection for another man. As my rival was a car, I showed affection towards another car. But the Sapristi was so expensive that I had to try to recoup. I began writing about it. When I realised that you were willing to sacrifice everything so that I could keep the wretched Sapristi, I knew what a fool I'd been."

"Darling," said Gascon, when he was once more able to speak, for Deirdre was now upon his knee, "if only you'd understood about Mr. District Attorney."

"What was there for me to understand?"

"Well, I'm not good at words in the way you are. It's just this: I'm a companionable sort of chap and I like to be surrounded by companionable characters. Call it a contrast to the Snapdragons, if you like. That's the great thing about vintage cars: they have character, good or bad.

"I know all sorts of reasons are given for calling them vintage: good technical reasons. But as I see it, their virtue lies in the fact that they were handbuilt by craftsmen. Then most of them have had lots of owners. Chaps who've cursed and coddled them, tinkered with them when they broke down, courted in them, taught their sons to drive in them. You can't do that to a car and have it remain inanimate. It becomes a character through having seen life, just as people do. I think the real difference between new cars and old is this: a modern car is a child and just about as companionable; whereas a good vintage car is a character and a friend."

"Darling," said Deirdre, "how about introducing me to your faithful friend, Mr. District Attorney? Then I can break the news to him that we're not going to sell him after all."

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FOUR-LITRE WORDS

***Car crash:** It can be explained in words of one cylinder.*

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WHALE KILLERS

The massive black tail stood high above them, cutting out the sun

BY ROBERT EDMOND ALTER

THE sea was harder then—bigger, more remote. There was no machinery, no electricity, and harpoons were not fired from guns. Men had to look to themselves for help and to the seamen who toiled next to them; and every man—whether twelve or seventy—was logged as a man and depended upon as such. And so when this boy, this Jesse, weakened for one moment, they turned against him. Eighteen years of growing up to that moment, and after it they put their backs to him; they referred to him among themselves as the Jumping Jack and pretended he no longer existed. And he was going to live with them in a two-hundred-and-fifty-ton whaler for three years.

The old whaler *Bunyan* raised the Cape Verde Islands on 6th June, and that was the first thing they'd seen beyond the plate of sea and bowl of sky in thirty-two days. The second thing they saw was the pod of right whales.

The mastheads had had their best eyes bribed by the offer of a golden guinea to the first man who cried "Blows!" And to the common whaler, who was breaking his back for three years to receive his two-hundredth lay—which at best could only fetch eighteen pounds—the guinea had the aspect of an Aztec treasure.

When the call came it was high, ecstatic, the masthead cracking his throat to gain the guinea.

"She blows! Right whales to larb'rd! A pod of 'em!"

To Jesse, the new hand, the cry was the accumulation of all his childhood dreams. He dropped his holystone, springing from grime-stained knees to bare feet, and plunged into the infectious aura of apprehension and excitement that emanated from his shipmates.

From the quarterdeck the old man's thin reedy voice piped orders in near hysteria: "Hard up with the helm!" and "Man the braces, Mr. Star! Stand by to wear!" And he went *thunk-thunk-thunk* here, there, everywhere on his whalebone-knobbed cane, his crabbed fingers clutching it like talons.

The mates and bosun went after the crew with knotted rope-

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ends as the ponderous *Bunyan* began to pay off to leeward, driving them to slack away on the lee sheets and braces and hove taut on the windwards. And the whale spouts began to haul forward along the larboard beam.

They gathered along the bulwark beneath the boats swinging overhead, ready at the command to pile overboard. The first mate, Star, the man referred to as *the* mate, reached for Jesse's shoulder with fingers like marlinspikes.

"You're a husky lad and with a generous reach to your arms. You'll be my stroke oar."

It meant Jesse would break his back more than the others; but he was young and wide-eyed and so he was honoured. "Aye, sir!" he said.

At the order the helmsman luffed sharply to deaden the headway, and the old whaler sagged up into the wind, topsails flapping.

"All right, damn your eyes!" Star roared indiscriminately. "A dead whale or a stove boat! Lower away!"

All along the larboard the boatfalls ran out. Jesse scrabbled over the rail and into the dropping boat with the mate, the harpooner, Benjy, and three others. The boat struck water, falls slackened, fore and aft were cast loose; out went the sweeps, and the mate shipped his steering oar.

"Give way!" he snarled at them.

Jesse laid all of him back into the long hard haul. At that moment he was willing to tear his arms from their sockets to please the glowering mate.

It was hard work—the hardest ever, dragging back on those twelve-foot ash oars. And at every stroke Star's voice nagged at them, "Pull! Pull like you were pulling yourselves out of the mouth of hell instead of going into it—which you are. Pull till her keel is clear of the water and she walks on the oar blades alone! Pull! Damn your backs!"

At each back drag Jesse's head arched upward, and he saw the pallid sun and the sharp blue sky around it. And his lungs panted like swelling bellows, and his muscles leapt and quivered all along his salt-stained arms, and the oar seemed to have the heft of a main upper topsail yard.

"Pull till your tongues turn to black leather, till your eyes roll red! No! Don't look! I'll stove the head of any man that looks round! Look aft at me! I'm your eyes. Pull!"

Suddenly Jesse heard a new sound mingle with the gasping and creaking and the muffled thumping of the oars: a great sharp sucking in and a slow expelling of a ton of air. He glanced at Star, saw the mate in a crouch staring straight ahead, and decided

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he must risk one look. He rolled his head and his eyes forward.

A great slick black hill sprawled before them, so close it did something in his heart—a catch and miss. And he had a flickering glance in the corner of his eye of Benjy rising to his feet, bringing the long harpoon up high over his right shoulder.

Jesse snapped his eyes round, looked at the tub just behind his thwart, at the line leading from it to the loggerhead in the stern and then running forward between the oarsmen to the bow chock and the harpoon. In a moment that line would start to life, would sing; any foul turn, just a single kink or loop, could whip about a man's neck, ankle, or wrist and snap him from the boat, pull him down deep in the sea. Jesse swallowed and edged an inch outboard on the thwart.

Star's voice was like a girl's whisper of love. "Oh, it's beautiful! Beautiful. Benjy, if you love me, Benjy . . ."

Abruptly he jammed the steering oar to starboard, sheering the boat into the whale hill, his face contorted in total frenzy. "Pull all! Beach me on yon hump! Beach me, damn you!"

Jesse's rump left the thwart as he lunged back on the oar. The boat leapt, jolted, canted up slightly in the bow.

"Yah!" Benjy screamed, and they all heard the *tunk!* of the harpoon spitting into blubber.

Everything was chaos. Alongside, the hill of whale became an earthquake, rolling violently sideways; a wall of green-white water built up, washing the boat to a high precarious platform; then they slid down, tumbling and clutching, with the line whirring overhead. Something black, gigantic, and reaching came out of the sea and arched into the sky—forty feet of it. The boat was spinning crazily in a wild trough.

"She flukes!"

Jesse looked up. The massive black tail stood high above them, cutting out the sun and casting a shadow over them with its flukes like a dark omen. Everything inside the boy sagged into limbo. He opened his mouth.

"Stern all! Stern for your lives!" Star bellowed.

Jesse didn't know that he was making a decision. What he did was without physical effort, without conscious direction of his will. He scrambled up and jumped overboard.

He couldn't understand when he came to the surface why he was alone. He looked around for the bobbing heads of his shipmates, for the boat wreckage, but saw nothing.

Then he heard a distant shout behind him. He finned himself about and, rising sharply on the crest of a swell, he saw Star's boat skimming off across the sea. The harpooned whale was taking the mate for a "Nantucket sleigh ride."

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Jesse was alone in the water. The others hadn't jumped.

The third mate's boat had caught a breeze and came heeling by with its lugsail fat and proud. None of its crew paid the slightest attention to the boy treading water, though he raised a hand to them and called on Mr. Hussey, the third mate.

He watched them going after Star's runaway boat as he rose and fell with the roll of the water and he couldn't understand. Didn't they see me? he wondered. Couldn't they hear me?

Hays, the pipe-mouthed, reflective second mate, picked him up. A starboard whalerman poked his oar at Jesse and let him haul himself up the shaft to the gunwale. None of them offered a hand, none of them spoke to him. It surprised him. He'd expected them to josh him about his narrow escape. They didn't even look at him.

Jesse slumped on the bottom at Hays' feet, gasping and spewing water. When his breath was recovered he tried to make a joke of it himself, saying, "Well, I didn't know it would be like that—not like a hurricane with a twister thrown in."

The stroke oar looked at him, a flat cold study.

"Give way," Hays ordered quietly.

Jesse pulled his eyes from the stroke oar and looked up at Hays.

"What's wrong?" he asked anxiously. "Was someone killed?"

Hays removed his pipe from his mouth and looked at it, top and bottom, as though he saw something strange in it. "No," he said tonelessly, "no one's been killed—no thanks to you."

Jesse stared. "What, sir? I don't understand what—"

"When a whale raises his flukes over a boat it doesn't do any good to jump. It's the duty of every oarsman to stick to his station, to backwater and get the boat clear of the flukes. You didn't stick. That left only three oarsmen; they all might have been killed."

Jesse looked at his blistered hands. A coppery taste came into his mouth.

"I didn't know," he whispered. "I thought it was the only thing to do, thought they were all doing it." He put his hand on Hays' knee. "I didn't know, Mr. Hays. Before God, I didn't!"

Hays returned the pipe to his mouth and slanted his eyes at the sea.

He became the try-pot boy, and that was all they would let him be. It was done on Star's order. Old Captain Perry had suffered a stroke two weeks out of Nantucket and was now nearly infirm. More and more he was becoming a figurehead skipper. Star's iron will held the *Bunyan* afloat and in business.

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When a whale or pod was sighted, Star's standing order was, "Keep that Jumping Jack clear of the boats."

Jesse said nothing; there was nothing to say, no one to say it to. He created a little island of silence. Where he went a hush followed; talk ceased, laughter broke short, eyes turned to the sea or to palm and fid with exaggerated contemplation, and the boy passed on alone.

After a whale was killed, it was lashed to the *Bunyan*'s hull and the cutting in began. The seamen swayed out catwalks and went to work on the dead leviathan with their flensing spades, cutting into the fatty layer of blubber. Huge blankets of blubber were unrolled and hoisted by block and tackle to the deck; there it was minced and dumped into great tubs, and from the tubs it went to the tryworks.

The tryworks were two gigantic pots set in a brick frame amidships, and under each pot was a kiln that needed constant feeding and ate only cast-off chunks of blubber. At one side of the tryworks was a wooden hopper containing the raw minced blubber; at the other a copper cistern into which the prepared oil was bailed to cool.

It was there that Jesse worked, with the red mouths of the two furnaces scolding at him for more fuel, with the boiling oil sloshing and exploding and the grey smoke—greasy and sickening—kicking about sluggishly underfoot. He stuck at it grimly, half blinded and gasping from smoke; speaking to no one and trying to pretend he didn't notice his shipmates, who were pretending not to notice him.

Off Trinidad, Hays' harpooner was caught in a coil in the line as a right whale sounded and was whisked into eternity without a cry. In the Falklands, Star's new stroke oar was crushed to death in a sperm whale's jaws, while his shipmates, swimming right below him in the wreckage of their boat, watched.

"Why don't they blame it on me?" Jesse had said bitterly to Hays when they were sharing a watch. "After all, he took my place."

And Hays, removing his pipe, inspecting it for flaws, had nodded. "They do. They think it should have been you. You see, they liked 'Lisha."

Then there was the Horn; and that cost them a man along with a larboard boat—both swept overboard at night. After that there was a stove boat and a whaler with stove ribs in the Antarctic current. And finally, inevitably, came the murmurings of a Jonah being aboard.

Hays put his pipe completely away that day, tucked it out of sight in his jacket, and faced the crew like a kindly schoolmaster

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reprimanding a class of rowdy children. "Stop it," he said to them quietly. "What do you expect when you try to make a pincushion of a whale? There's always a stove boat and a drowned man, and the Horn's always the Horn. Jonah? Your Jonah is your own superstition."

Jesse thanked the mate that night under the after boat rack. "I know who they had in mind," he said angrily. "If they had their way, they'd ship me overboard."

"You can't really blame them," Hays said. "And for that matter, you're not doing yourself any good by staying with us. Star will never let you taste blood now. You'll be the try-pot boy for the next two years. The next time we speak a whaler—why don't you ship over? You'd go with a clean slate."

But the boy shook his head doggedly. "No. I can't run away from it—couldn't live with it. I've got to make it up to these men." He turned to Hays. "Look—" he held out his arms, long, muscular, and gleaming in the moonlight—"look what the tryworks have done for me. I'm twenty pounds heavier. I think I can lick any man aboard this ship, and would, too, if it would prove anything to them."

"It wouldn't."

"But don't you see? I'd make the best stroke oar of all. And, Mr. Hays, I wouldn't jump. I wouldn't, sir—no matter what happened to the boat. Help me. Help me convince the mate."

Hays slapped the bowl of his pipe into his palm. "I've already tried that; brought it up again this evening."

"And?"

"Better try another whaler when we speak one."

The old spouter hammered along close-hauled through head seas, aiming north-west. On the days and nights when there had been a kill, Jesse would work at his try-pots. When they didn't bring him blubber, Star would have him inside the pots scouring them with soapstone.

The need for atonement had become an obsession with him. His berth was a blanket mangle of restless frustration. He would toss out of it at any hour of night and go topside to prowl the deck, to stare at the darkly rolling sea. He ate his food squatting off alone. He scoured and bailed, fed blubber to fire, and sweated through smoke that was like hot rancid butter. And sometimes he would be found standing in the waist doing nothing—standing with his fists clenched, staring down at the holystoned deck.

When they would speak another whaler, the boy would turn from the rail and go below. And because of this the seamen

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said they "knew it all the time." He was a coward—afraid to join another ship where he would be expected to taste blood.

He never defended himself. He waited a year, then felt he could wait no longer. He went below to the master cabin.

"Come!" Captain Perry squeaked at his knock.

Jesse opened the door and stepped into the cabin—the forbidden place for seamen. It was roomy, clean, and airy, bright from the skylight overhead and the windows in the stern. The old captain was padding about in his slippers and nightshirt; shuffling and pausing as though not quite certain where he was going next.

"Yes? Yes?" his reedy voice piped. "What now? Who are you?"

"Jesse, sir. I've come to ask you to put me in one—"

"Who? Who? Who? Jesse who?" The old man scuffled round the table, peering and blinking at the boy. "Jesse—Oh! You're the boy they call the Jumping Jack, aren't you? Yes, yes, that's who you be! Jumping Jack! He-he-he!" His cackling seemed to lead his mind astray. He bumped against the table and stared at it vacuously, as though surprised to find it there. "Jumping Jack," he murmured.

"Sir," Jesse said, "it was a mistake. I was young. I didn't know better. I'd never jump again. I want another chance, sir. I want to be in a boat again. I thought—"

The old man pushed at the table, but it wouldn't go away. "Star," he said abruptly. "Star handles the boats. See the mate. I'm not feeling well." He started hobbling aft round the table.

Jesse went after him, holding one hand out. "Please—the mate won't let me near the boats. I thought you—you're the—I mean—"

The old man approached his berth like a rudderless derelict drifting on to a lee shore. His brittle fingers fumbled across a blanket as though searching. "My Bible is missing," he muttered childishly. "Someone took my Bible; can't find it anywhere. I told Star; told him it was missing. Said he'd find it for me, but—" He hauled himself over the berthboard, mumbling and chuffing, and lay down like a scuttled ship settling on the bottom stern first.

Jesse looked at the old man, touched his shoulder in desperation.

The old man stared at the beam overhead. "A man shouldn't be at sea without his Bible. You remember that, lad. My wife gave me mine—forty years ago, I think it was. Star said he'd find it."

Jesse let his hand drop. He nodded. "Yes, sir," he said quietly. "He'll find it for you."

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He met the mate in the companionway. Star's eyes had the cold stare of two long guns before they broadside. "What're you sogering about down there, Jumping Jack?" he snapped.

Jesse didn't hate this man. If he had, he could never force himself to supplication. "Mr. Star—" he held on to the mate's hostile gaze, which was more than many could do—"I want another chance. I want to go back in the boats again."

"Been whining to the old man, eh?"

"Give you my word I won't jump. I'll give you more than that for a second chance. I'll go on my knees to you, to the whole crew if you'll say yes."

"Would you, Jumping Jack?" Star sneered. "Would you crawl? Aye, I suppose you would. But that's not what I ask of my seamen."

"You don't understand, sir."

"Belay!" Star shoved him against the hatch, pushing his weathered lump of face close to Jesse's. "I'll not mention my life. But you nearly cost me the lives of my boat crew. No one is ever going to forget that—no one, try-pot. Can't you get it into that blubbery head? I hate the sight of you. Now sheer off!" The mate shouldered by, clumping on down the stairs.

And Jesse, frustrated by the imposed impotency, shouted after him, "I'll never leave this ship! You hear me, Mr. Mate? Never! I'll stay till *you* crawl to me for help. And then you can all go to hell!"

For four days they chased a whale pod off the Marquesas. During those four days they fought two decisive battles—both in favour of the whales. The first leviathan victory only cost the *Bunyan* a boat; but the second took the lives of the third mate, his harpooner, and one oarsman—pounded to pulp under the smashing flukes of a sperm whale.

On the fourth night, Jesse was standing at the helm and heard, through the skylight, the mate and Mr. Hays arguing below in the cuddy.

"I said no and I'll stand by that." It was Star's voice.

"But we're shorthanded!" Hays answered, close to anger. "One officer and five men dead; three more in sick bay; and the old man—"

"Then we'll sail short. The Jumping Jack stays where he is."

"At least put in to Nuku Hiva. We'll try to replenish the crew."

"What? Leave this pod without one kill? I'd rather cut off my arm. No; *after* the kill—then Nuku Hiva."

"You're a stubborn fool, Star."

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"And you a weak one, mister. Weak enough to let that Jumping Jack's whining turn your head."

"He doesn't whine; he waits."

"Does he? Then let me tell you, mister, just how long he's going to wait . . ."

Jesse was glad when he was relieved at the wheel. He didn't want to hear more.

Each day now Jesse would stand at the bulwark and stare at Star as the boats were lowered. And each day Star would scowl and go over the rail without a word. And this day was the same—the look, the scowl, and then the mate was overboard and shouting orders from his boat.

But something happened with Hays' boat. Thomas Pickering, Hays' stroke oar, slacking off on the davit cleat, missed his footing and took a fall into the lowering whaleboat.

"My elbone!" he cried. "Cracked my elbone!"

Hays said something profoundly dark and looked up at the bulwark. Jesse stared down at him, making an invisible bridge between them with his appeal. *A second chance; I won't jump.*

"Take stroke, Jesse!" Hays called.

And Jesse went over the side.

He rowed his heart out, laying his body nearly horizontal on every stroke. Hays, crouched in the stern sheets, clinging to the steering oar, spoke to them with a low, fierce intensity, giving them a beat. "Send! . . . Send! Send-her-out-of-the-water, my buckos! Break the oars, but send! . . . Send! Break-the-thole-pins-if-you'd-rather and send! . . . Send!"

Jesse, at the stroke oar, made Hays increase the pace of his chant; and within minutes his shipmates were sucking and blowing as though strangling. "Drop, drop the stroke, ye blasted Jumping Jack!" they gasped at him. But he ignored them and gritted his teeth in a ghastly grin at Hays. And slowly their boat began to crawl up with Star's.

The mate glanced back, looked again, then roared, "Hays! Who's that stroke oar? Is that the Jumping Jack? Why, damn your eyes, mister! I'll break you for this!"

Hays pulled his pipe from his mouth and grinned. "Could it wait till after I've made my kill?" he called.

Star looked ahead as though plotting Hays' course. "Hays!" he bellowed. "That's *my* kill! You hear me?"

Hays waved his pipe. "Come help us with it!" And to his crew, "Send! . . . Send! . . . Send-me-from-the-water-like-a-gull!"

It was a sperm, a monster of the species—seventy-five foot, the harpooner judged. Jesse didn't look. He, like the rest, kept his

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eyes on Hays' suspended hand. He could hear the wheezing and snuffling of the bull close by and the minor clattering of the harpooner's preparations. Hays' hand flashed down. He put the steering oar over.

"Send! Strike, Obed!"

They leapt forward; again came the jolt of the bow and the *tunk!* of the harpoon. Then the seaquake exploded over them.

"Stern all! Stern for your lives! He flukes!"

Jesse lunged forward, digging at the foaming water with his oar blade, and the boat skittered away crazily. He didn't look up at the great flukes he knew were hanging over his head, he fought the careening boat with maniacal fury. The whale sounded, and the waving flukes slammed between the two boats.

Someone was screaming something. Jesse looked round. It was Star's exuberant harpooner.

"Got him on both sides! I got an iron in his larboard!"

They sagged on the oars, gasping; they looked at one another, then overboard at a turbulent smear of scarlet froth on the moving water. Hays looked at Jesse, then across to Star, as if to say, "He's still here."

But the mate's cryptic expression seemed to reply, "It's not over yet."

But Jesse thought it was. He relaxed and looked at his raw palms. In less than an hour the bull would surface; they would go after him and drive the lance into his heart. And Jesse would be a man who had tasted blood.

But the crews of both boats were fidgety—biting their lips and glancing at the water. When Hays and his harpooner changed fore and aft positions, the harpooner said, "It might be a near thing, Mr. Mate. He's a fightin' whale. I saw old iron in him."

"What's he mean?" Jesse asked a shipmate. "A fighting whale?" The seaman shook his head.

"Means he's an old hand. Been harpooned afore an' got away. When he comes up he'll be lookin' for us."

They were all watching the water now, silent and tense. Suddenly Star straightened up. "Hays! Stern, man! He's—"

Jesse saw the black gleam of a great shape materialising under the boat. He opened his mouth, wrapping his hands hard about the oar handle.

A mountainous black mass reared out of the water, kicking the starboard oars into the air. It was the whale's blunt snout, and it kept coming; and the long underjaw lined with spikelike teeth came crashing down and slid under the boat.

Nothing made sense to Jesse. Everywhere was screaming and smashing. His equilibrium was gone; he was only conscious of a

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gigantic lifting under him. Men were jumping, tumbling into the sea willy-nilly. Only one repeated word had meaning: "Jump! Jump! Jump!"

But he wouldn't. He thrashed about desperately amidships, coming up in a trembling half-crouch, and looked straight into the sperm whale's cavernous maw. It rose sheer above him and around him, and for a suspended moment he saw the deep pits in the upper jaw where the great teeth of the lower bedded. But the lower jaw, he realised, was beneath him; it was, in fact, lifting the boat high from the water.

He turned and leapt headlong towards the bow as the jaws came together, splintering the boat to matchwood. He was in a tangle of line, paddles, and lances; and the bow section was tipping straight down, falling into the sea. He saw bobbing heads beneath him, arms flailing the churned water—then the crash.

The chaos was worse underwater—kicking men, splinters, broken oars, paddles, blubber spades, boat boxes, and hempen line coiling and whipping everywhere. The water was dark blue, smeared with crimson. And directly before Jesse was the great blurred shape of the whale's snout. Stupidly he reached for his sheath knife. Then his sweeping left hand caught something, and he went up with it.

He broke surface and found he was grasping a gunwale. Spewing water, wheezing, his hands clawing and ripping at wood for support, he spilt himself over the gunwale and into a half-flooded boat. *I didn't jump! Damn you, I didn't!* He thought he was shouting, but he wasn't, couldn't.

Something was wrong. The harpoon line was smoking from the loggerhead out through the bow chock. It couldn't be Hays' boat; that boat was splinters. Then Star had been dumped also. Now everyone was in the water except Jesse. No, not everyone—he saw a man's body jammed under the stroke oar's thwart, pinned underwater. Jesse stumbled, splashed aft and caught the man by the hair and raised the face—Star!

The boat jolted. Jesse went headlong into the stern sheets. He turned, grabbing for the mate's hair again. A voice that might have belonged to Hays was shouting, "Jump! Jump, Jesse!"

He didn't. He wrestled with the mate's bulky body, trying to haul it up into his lap, and saw bright red streaks running from Star's hair. Hit his head, he thought absently.

He looked forward and saw that he was being taken for the "sleigh ride." His knife was gone, the boat's hatchet was missing, but he found a lance on the floorboards. He propped the unconscious mate in the stern sheets and turned to the flying warp to cut it with the razorbladed lance, but he stalled indecisively.

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After a while he put the lance down and crawled back to the stern sheets with the mate. The harpoon line vibrating like a plucked harp string, the whaleboat was flying with sickening slams from crest to crest with spray cascading back from the bows. Mile fell into mile in the crazy whirling wake of the helpless boat.

The singing in the line toned down to a hum, and the wisps of blue smoke about the loggerhead vanished. Jesse watched the line; it went slack. The whale had stopped. The boy looked at the mate. "Ask me for help, Star," he whispered. "Go on. Ask me to do your job now that you can't." He laughed crazily and began hand-hauling the boat along the line.

As he pulled, hand over hand, the boat came ponderously up to the shining black mountain, creeping diagonally astern of the whale just safely clear of the slowly thrashing flukes. Jesse brought the bow up to where the harpoon pierced its side.

He waded through a tangle of line, carrying the lance. He braced his left leg against the forward thwart and, with both hands, brought the lance high above his head. The gleaming hump swelled up, over and away from him.

He drove the slender iron shaft six feet into the whale, putting more than just his weight and strength into the blow—putting his soul into the lance.

The sun was low, golden weary, when Hays came up in the third boat. The crew let out a cheer when they saw the dead sperm whale wallowing in a distant trough; but hushed when they looked in Jesse's face. He wasn't mad—as some first thought—but in a sort of calm shock.

They grappled the gunwale of the half submerged boat and lifted the unconscious Star aboard. Jesse was sitting slack-armed in the water, staring at the whale. He didn't make a move to leave the boat until Hays leaned over and put a hand on his shoulder.

"It's all right now, lad. You don't have to jump. Just step over the gun'le."

He sat in the stern with Hays and, as the boat gave way, he looked across the sea.

The dead whale was down on its starboard side, its larboard fin standing stiff and stark in the air, slablike against a milk sky. It was like a monument.

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Accordionist: a person who plays both ends against the middle.

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ALFRED HITCHCOCK's Choice

Interest for the new financial year!

CAT BURGLAR

By HENRY SLESAR

IF I ever had to list the qualifications of a Master Criminal, I'd think about my cousin Ruby Martinson and list, among others, (1) Nerve, (2) Ingenuity, (3) Daring, and (4) Contempt for ordinary virtues, such as Gratitude, Love of Animals, and Respect for Motherhood.

And if there was one caper which demonstrated all four of these fiendish qualities, it was the Affair of the Striped Cat.

This wasn't its only notable feature, however, because as I think back over Ruby's long criminal history, it was one of the few capers in which we didn't lose money. Most of the time Ruby's ingenious schemes, plotted in cunning detail at a rear table in Hector's Cafeteria, ended up in financial disaster.

This aspect of his career was tough enough on Ruby, who earned less than seventy dollars a week as an accountant, but it was even tougher on me, who was eighteen and seemingly incapable of making more than twenty-five.

It all started during the Season. The Season, in Ruby's jargon, was that time of the year in accounting circles when income tax returns are being prepared. It seems that Ruby, as a personal favour to his boss, had completed the tax return for an old friend named Mrs. Herkimer. Mrs. Herkimer was a kind of wealthy widow and, although I never met her, I envisioned her as a sweet whitehaired old lady in a black shawl, with a beatific smile on her face. But when Ruby spoke of her, his description wasn't nearly as kind.

"This old girl's got more money than she can spend," he told me at Hector's one day. "She lives all alone in this fancy house on Long Island, and she spends more money on her cat than I make in a year."

"Her cat?" I said.

"She's nuts about this stupid cat of hers. Matilda. She practically wanted me to deduct her as a dependent. Can you imagine that?" He snorted. "These rich old widows make me

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want to throw up," he said disgustedly, dipping his roll in the coffee.

Ruby didn't mention Mrs. Herkimer again until almost three months later, when the warm weather was first coming upon the city. Only this time, his attitude towards the old lady had apparently mellowed.

"Hey," he said, "you remember that old dame, Mrs. Herkimer, the one I did the income tax work for? She's invited me to spend this weekend at her place on Long Island. A real ritzy joint, swimming pool and everything."

"Gee!" I said. "That's great."

"Yeah, but listen to this. This afternoon, she rings me up at the office and tells me that her sister, who lives in Alabama, is taken ill, and she has to go down there and stay with her. She doesn't want to disappoint me; so she's sent me a set of housekeys, by messenger. She wants me to use the place anyway, and bring a friend if I like. It's all mine for the weekend."

"Wow," I said, trying to share Ruby's enthusiasm. "Sure sounds fun, Ruby."

"Maybe," he said craftily, with a light in his eyes I didn't like. "Maybe it will be fun. I got a couple of ideas . . ." Then he slapped me on the shoulder. "How'd you like to come along, kid? See how the other half lives?"

"Gosh, Ruby, you really mean it? Me?"

"Why not? We'll have a great time. If it's warm enough, we'll even go swimming."

I hesitated, suddenly afraid that there was more to the invitation than friendship. But I always had a hard time refusing Ruby anything, and the thought of a swimming pool without nine million screaming people in it was tempting. I said yes, and tried to forget all my uneasy feelings.

Ruby picked me up at my house around seven-thirty on Friday night, driving his uncle's car. I hated driving with Ruby because he was frankly a terrible driver, hunched over the wheel like a jockey, his freckled face grimly intent, his eyes squinting through his thick-lensed glasses. It was a wonder we ever reached Mrs. Herkimer's place.

Well, I won't say that I was disappointed in Mrs. Herkimer's mansion, I was merely surprised. It was plush, all right, but plush in a Gay Nineties kind of way. There were doilies everywhere you looked, and huge paintings with their own individual light fixtures, and overstuffed furniture with legs like lions' paws. But it was a *rich* place, no doubt of that.

That first night, Ruby and I sat round the gigantic fireplace,

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and spread ourselves like a couple of millionaires. I was feeling pretty good, especially after Ruby gave me a teensy glass of some brown fluid he called amontillado, but the stuff began turning sour in my stomach when Ruby said, "I got it all worked out, kid. This job'll net us a couple of thousand, at least."

"Job?" I gulped. "What job, Ruby?"

"Don't be dumb, kid. Ever see a better opportunity than this?

"We're *inside*, pal, and legitimately. The house is our oyster; all we got to do is find the pearls and they're our very own."

I tried to protest so fast that my tongue got all tangled up with my teeth. "But, Ruby, you can't do anything like that! It's not fair! I mean, the old lady invited you here. You can't take advantage of her— "

"Don't be a fool," Ruby snapped. "I'm not going to take just *anything*. For one thing, it wouldn't be so clever, would it? The old lady knows we're here, don't forget that."

I sighed in relief—prematurely.

"Nah," Ruby said. "We're going to play it smart. We're going to find the place where the old lady keeps her best jewellery. We're going to snatch some and have paste copies made, then we'll put the phonies back. She never wears the stuff, anyway: the chances of her ever finding out are nil."

I knew that all my protests wouldn't swerve Ruby from his elected course, so all I did was sort of slump down and look dejected. But Ruby wouldn't let me relax for long. In a couple of minutes we went in search of Mrs. Herkimer's jewellery. I kept hoping we wouldn't find it, that the old woman had decided to take every last diamond to Alabama with her—and for the first half hour of the search, it looked as if she had.

But then Ruby found the safe.

"Hey, look at this!" he cried. "This is where the stuff is!"

I looked, and in the bottom of an otherwise empty bedroom cupboard saw a squat, ugly black safe about four feet square. It appeared to be made of iron, and there was a combination lock on the door. I didn't know whether to be glad or sorry—the safe looked absolutely impregnable; but on the other hand I knew there were no limits to Ruby's ingenuity.

He bent down to it, tried the door, and cursed softly. Then he began rubbing his fingertips on the lapel of his jacket.

"Whatcha doing, Ruby?" I said.

"I'm polishing my fingers. They always polish their fingers when they crack a safe. Don't you know anything?"

"But why, Ruby?"

"How should I know?" he snarled.

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He put his ear to the door, and started turning the dial of the lock, first this way and then that. He did this for about five minutes, and I said, " Whatcha listening for, Ruby? "

" The tumblers, you dope. You're supposed to hear the tumblers drop into place." Obviously the tumblers were being obstinate, because he straightened up a moment later and said, " If I only had some soup—"

" Soup? " I said.

" Yeah, soup—nitro. I'd blast this thing wide open."

" Gee, Ruby! "

" I know, I know," he grumbled. " I can't do that; it would be too obvious. The old lady would pin it on us sure. We gotta find another way . . ." He really seemed stumped, and I was just as happy to see him that way. Then he snapped his fingers. The sound went through me like a gunshot. I knew what the finger-snapping meant: Ruby had come up with an idea.

" Follow me," he said, heading for the living-room downstairs.

I followed him, and saw him make a beeline for the telephone table in the hall. He dragged out the Classified section and went thumbing through its pages. Then he smiled, put a skinny finger on one of the columns, and dialled a number. When nobody answered, he swore under his breath and tried another. After five attempts he got a reply.

" Hullo, Supersafe's? " he said. " My name is Herkimer. I have a problem with a safe . . . I know it's late, but this is important . . . What's that? . . . No, it can't wait until tomorrow, this is an emergency." He looked at me and scowled. " You don't understand," he said into the receiver. " I came here to visit my aunt, and found the door of her safe open. I slammed it shut, and heard a cat miaow . . . I said *cat* . . . That's right. The crazy thing likes it in there. And now the safe's closed and I can't reach my aunt to get the combination . . ." He stopped, and his tone got angry. " All right, all right! " he said. " I *will* call the cops, if that's your attitude! "

He slammed down the receiver and turned to me. " What d'you think of that? " he said savagely. " They won't even help get a poor defenceless animal out of a safe—"

" What animal? " I said.

He ignored me. " So if I can't get a locksmith, I'll get the cops."

" The cops? " I shouted, shaking in every limb. " Ruby, you can't call the cops! "

" Why not? They're supposed to help people. Aren't they always getting cats out of sewers, and things like that? The least they can do is get the cat out of the safe—"

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" But, Ruby—there is no cat in the safe."

" How do you know? You got X-ray eyes or something? "

" But, Ruby, the *cops*—"

" It's their duty, right? So what if they don't find the cat there. I could have made a mistake, couldn't I? I mean, nobody's perfect."

He went to the telephone again, and every protective instinct in my body told me to turn and run, but I was a long way from home. I stood by numbly while Ruby called the local police, identified himself by name, and told the true story of our visit. Except for the cat business, of course. I couldn't hear what was said on the other end, but I knew from Ruby's satisfied expression that his plan was bearing fruit.

I think the only reason I survived the next couple of hours was the brown stuff I poured into the teensy glass four times. I was so tranquillised by the time the cops came that I think I actually believed there was a cat sitting in the black safe in Mrs. Herkimer's bedroom. I think I was even a little weepy about it.

The two men who showed up were both in plain clothes, and one of them seemed to know a few things about Mrs. Herkimer. His name was Kelly, and he said, " Hey, is this the cat that she lost a couple of months ago? "

" Lost? " Ruby said blankly. " What do you mean? "

" We got a call from Mrs. Herkimer a couple of months back, reporting that her cat had strayed and didn't return. She was real upset about it, offered a hundred-dollar reward. Hell of a lot of money for a cat."

The other man, a greying, fiftyish guy with a paunch, chuckled. " Maybe we'll claim it, if we get the safe open."

" If anybody can crack it," Kelly said, " Harris is your boy. He would have made a great crook, right, Al? "

" Sure." The paunchy man grinned. " But I'm too nervous. If this is a standard combination type, O.K., but don't expect miracles if it's one of these modern jobs. They need special equipment, and I don't have it."

We all went to the bedroom, and the paunchy cop set to work. Ruby watched him intently, probably trying to pick up a few pointers for the future; as for myself, I lay down on the bed and rested, trying to make the room, which had suddenly begun to spin, settle down to normal.

I don't know how long it was that the cop sweated and grunted with the lock; it couldn't have been more than ten minutes, but it seemed like hours. When I first saw the thing in the bedroom doorway, I thought it was an onset of delirium tremens, and I sat

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up and blinked hard, trying to make it go away. It didn't. It just stood there quietly, watching the proceedings with interest. After a while, I began to realise that it wasn't any hallucination—it was real. "Hey!" I yelled. "The cat!"

They all whirled and looked in the direction of my pointing finger. The striped cat in the doorway didn't seem to mind the attention; she picked up her front paw and licked it casually.

"The cat!" Kelly said. "Well, what do you know!"

Ruby was pop-eyed at this point, but I was so relieved that the poor thing was safely out of the iron box that I didn't care. It was only after the first reaction that I remembered the cat was never *in* the safe. But it was too late to change the plan; the paunchy guy stood up, chuckled, and went, "Here, pussy, pussy, pussy!"

The cat came to him, sniffed his polished fingertips, and then walked off disinterestedly. Kelly said, a little grumpily, "Well, I guess you made a mistake. The cat wasn't in there at all."

"No," Ruby said feebly. "Ha ha. It was a mistake."

"No harm done," the paunchy chap said, probably glad that he didn't have to prove his ability after all. "The old lady will be happy, anyway."

"Yeah." Ruby smiled tightly. "She'll be tickled pink."

"Let's go," Kelly grunted.

They left a few minutes later and all we had for our trouble was an unopened safe and a fat striped cat.

I needn't tell you that I was happy to see the caper end that way. I tried to communicate my good mood to Ruby, but he preferred to remain miserable. Worse than that, he looked thoughtful, and I knew that Ruby Martinson wasn't going to let one setback halt his dedicated march of crime.

"All right," he told me the next day, "so we can't get the old lady's jewellery. But maybe we've got something that's worth a lot more to her."

"Huh?" I said. "What's that, Ruby?"

"Her cat, you dope. Matilda."

"Sure," I said happily. "After all, she did offer a hundred dollars reward. Maybe we can claim it."

"A hundred bucks!" Ruby said contemptuously. "I'm talking about *big* money, stupid. Listen, that old dame spent thousands on this pussy last year. This mangy old cat is like her child."

"So?"

"So don't you see? If she thought the cat was in danger, if she thought she'd never see her again—she'd be willing to shell out plenty more than a measly hundred. Get it?"

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I shook my head.

"Kidnapping!" Ruby said bluntly. "That's what we're going to do!"

"Catnapping?"

"Very funny," Ruby snapped. "But you'll see—we'll write to the old girl and tell her we have Matilda, describe her to a T, even send some of her fur along so she'll know we're not fooling. Then we'll threaten to put the cat in a paper bag and throw her in the river if the old lady doesn't come across with—" Ruby speculated— "a thousand bucks."

"A thousand? For a cat?"

"Not just *any* cat, stupid. Her beloved Matilda. She'd pay five times that if we insisted, but no use being greedy. After all, we're her guests." A look of self-sacrifice crossed Ruby's face, and then he went in search of pen and paper.

Well, Ruby wrote the ransom note, describing Matilda and telling Mrs. Herkimer to post a thousand dollars to the general delivery office at Grand Central. He signed it Fred Feline.

The tougher part was getting a specimen of Matilda's fur. The cat had been friendly until then, licking our hands and purring like an outboard motor, but as soon as Ruby started tracking her with the scissors, she got coy. It was amazing how fast she moved, especially since Matilda was really a big fat cat, as big as a striped balloon. Finally, after sustaining several scratches on his wrists and cheek, Ruby managed to corner her, and snip off half an inch of fur.

We posted the letter in the morning, and kept an eye on Matilda all Sunday to make sure she didn't disappear again. She was a peculiar cat, all right. I never saw one so overstuffed before. And the way she acted was odd, too, rolling around and pawing at the air for no apparent reason, setting up a wail for nothing at all. We watched her carefully all day, and never did get to the Herkimer swimming pool.

When the time came to leave on Sunday night, the decision had to be made about who would keep Matilda. I immediately volunteered to let Ruby take her. The only trouble was, Ruby said, that his mother was violently allergic to cats—in addition to horses, dogs, tobacco smoke, and moustaches. My mother wasn't so happy about cats either, but the decision was made, much as I disliked the responsibility of being in charge of an obviously crazy cat worth a cool thousand dollars.

For two days that cat cavorted around my house like something possessed. My mother couldn't understand what I saw in such a loony pussy, and began muttering dark old-world beliefs about the evil eye. One night when I was asleep, that goofy cat

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jumped on my chest and I screamed so loud I woke the neighbours.

On the third day, we still hadn't heard from the old lady in Alabama, and Matilda was behaving more strangely than ever. I phoned Ruby about it, and he came up to the house to look her over. It was then that my mother said something which put fear into both of us. "That cat's ill," she said. "That cat hasn't got long, believe me."

"Gosh, Ruby," I quavered. "What if she's right?"

He chewed his lip thoughtfully. "That might be tough, all right. Herkimer probably won't make a stink if she gets her cat back in good condition. But if Matilda dies—" He paused. "There's only one thing to do, kid. We've got to take her to a vet. There's a cat and dog hospital over on Lexington Avenue. Let's see what they say."

We rang up the place, and were told that there'd be a vet on duty until nine. That gave us only half an hour to make it, so we took a taxi all the way. It cost us two bucks, and the vet's fee was three, and we weren't rid of the expenses yet.

The cat doctor takes one look at Matilda and says, "Nothing wrong with this cat. She's just pregnant."

"Pregnant?" Ruby yelped. "You mean she's gonna have a—"

"It's usually kittens," the vet said dryly.

"So that's where she was off to," Ruby said, mopping his brow. "How long's she got?"

"Hard to say. But I'd guess that it won't be more than a week or two. You don't have to worry; a cat knows how to manage these things. Just see that she's well fed, and has a nice warm place to go to."

"But she can't do that!" I said frantically. "Not in my house, Ruby!"

Ruby bit his lip. "O.K. So how much would it cost to board Matilda here? Until the kittens came?"

"Ten dollars a week."

"Let's do it, Ruby," I pleaded. "My mother'll have kittens if—I mean my mother'll scream blue murder—"

"O.K.," Ruby said, reaching for his wallet. "I guess it's worth it."

So we left Matilda there, and I was happy to be rid of her. I even began to feel good about the caper, and had visions of pocketing the five hundred that would be my split when the ransom money came through. But I should have known better . . .

The next day I got a call from Ruby, telling me to meet him at Hector's, and the moment I saw his face, and the purple envelope in his hand, I knew the news was bad.

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" Read this," he said, handing me the letter. I did.

Sir, Unfortunately, I cannot send you any money since the cat in your possession is obviously not Matilda. Matilda was a male Manx cat with orange and yellow stripes. If you locate him, the reward is one hundred dollars. Thank you for your interest.
Sincerely, (Mrs.) Irene Herkimer

" A male? " I said, staring at Ruby. " A *male*? "

" Yeah," he answered glumly. " How do you like that crazy old coot, naming a male cat Matilda? "

" Then where did the *other* cat come from? What was it doing there? "

Ruby shrugged. " Don't ask me. I guess it was Matilda's girl-friend, coming round to air her grievances . . ."

Well, as I said at the beginning, it wasn't a total loss. Our pregnant cat gave birth two weeks later, to a litter of cute tailless Manx kittens with orange and yellow stripes.

Ruby gave them to Mrs. Herkimer, and she forced twenty-five dollars on Ruby despite his feeble protests. That meant we broke even on the caper, and for my cousin Ruby Martinson, that wasn't bad at all.

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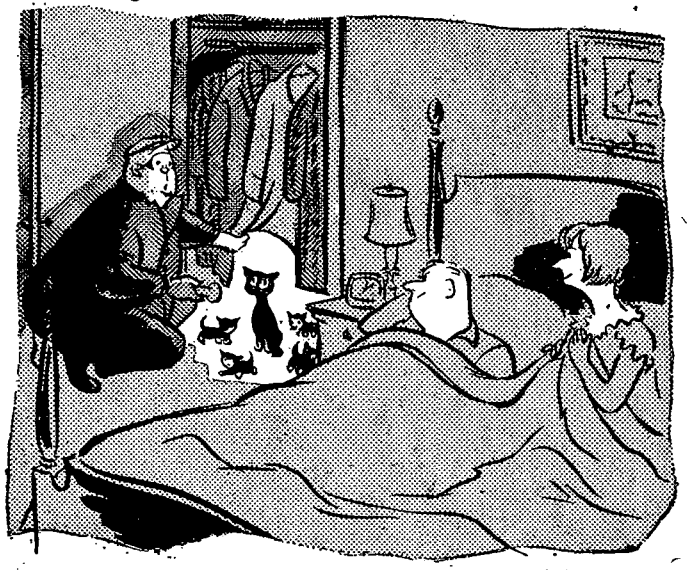
Butch the Burglar



" What do you mean, 'finding's keeping'? "

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Mirror, Mirror

Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who is the fairest of us all?

In her moments of grief or dejection,
(Her life without these may not pass),
She'll reflect on the tearful reflection—
A pretty sad face in the glass!

Or when dimpled bright Joy may have kist her
As Love comes his darling to claim—
She will smile on her pretty twin sister,
Who smiles upon her from the frame!

J. ASHBY-STERRY, *Boudoir Ballads*

Crying Shame

"I will paint you in the black velvet gown you wore last night, with the Medici collar, and the jolly arrangement of lace and diamonds on your head. And in your hand you shall hold an antique crystal mirror, mounted in silver."

The artist half closed his eyes, and as he described his picture in a voice full of music and mystery, an attentive hush fell on the gay group around him . . .

"In your left hand, you shall hold the mirror, but you shall not be looking into it; because you never look into mirrors, dear Duchess, excepting to see whether the scolding you are giving your maid, as she stands behind you, is making her cry; and whether that is why she is being so clumsy in her manipulation of pins and things. If it is, you promptly promise her a day off, to go and see her old mother; and pay her journey there and back. If it isn't, you scold her some more. Were I the maid, I

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should always cry, large tears warranted to show in the glass, only I should not sniff, because sniffing is so intensely aggravating; and I should be most frightfully careful that my tears did not run down your neck."

"Dal, you ridiculous *child*!" said the duchess . . .

FLORENCE L. C. BARCLAY, *The Rosary*

Man-trap

So let me have the rouge again,
And comb my hair the curly way.
The poor young men, the dear young men—
They'll all be here by noon today.

And I shall wear the blue, I think—
They beg to touch its rippled lace;
Or do they love me best in pink,
So sweetly flattering the face?

And are you sure my eyes are bright,
And is it true my cheek is clear?
Young What's-his-name stayed half the night;
He vows to cut his throat, poor dear!

So bring my scarlet slippers, then,
And fetch the powder-puff to me.
The dear young men, the poor young men—
They think I'm only seventy!

DOROTHY PARKER, *Ninon de l'Enclos, on her last birthday*

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Painted Ladies

We left our car in the Clarendon yard, and, as we were very early, having allowed half an hour in case of two punctures, we made for Elliston and Cavell's ladies-room, and gazed at ourselves, with a tiny feeling of uncertainty, in the looking-glasses there. Our cheeks had round scarlet patches, our lips were the same colour, but only at the edges, inside it had already worn off, and our eyelids were blue, all out of Jassy's paint-box. Our noses were white, Nanny having produced some powder with which, years ago, she used to dust Robin's bottom. In short, we looked like a couple of Dutch dolls.

"We must keep our ends up," said Linda, uncertainly.

"Oh, dear," I said, "the thing about me is, I always feel so much happier with my end down."

We gazed and gazed, hoping thus, in some magical way, to make ourselves feel less peculiar. Presently we did a little work with damp handkerchiefs, and toned our faces down a bit. We then sallied forth into the street, looking at ourselves in every shop window that we passed. (I have often noticed that when women look at themselves in every reflection, and take furtive peeps into their hand looking-glasses, it is hardly ever, as is generally supposed, from vanity, but much more often from a feeling that all is not quite as it should be.)

NANCY MITFORD, *The Pursuit of Love*

Two of a Kind

Glass antique! 'twixt thee and Nell
Draw we here a parallel!
She, like thee, was forced to bear
All reflections, foul or fair.
Thou art deep and bright within;
Depths as bright belonged to Gwynne;
Thou art very frail as well,
Frail as flesh is—so was Nell.

LAMON BLANCHARD, *Nell Gwynne's Looking Glass*

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TWO SINGLES TO EARTH

My father gave his egg a tremendous crack—wishing it was Grandpa

BY E. L. MALPASS

WHEN Father decided to go into business, the biggest problem turned out to be Grandpa.

Lived with us for years, the old man had. But this was different. "Cannot take him all that way at his age," Mother said, worried. "Might kill the old gentleman."

Regarded this eventuality with fortitude, did my father. "Have to risk it," he said. "You tell him, after tea. Come better from you, good girl."

So after tea, Mother sat down on a stool at his feet and said brightly, "Now, Grandpa, got some news for you. Taken a little business we have, sweets and tobacco."

Not liking change, old people. Foxy, the old gentleman looked. "Is it hereabouts?" he asked.

"Well, not exactly," said Mother.

An understatement, that. And Mother knew it. She swallowed. "It is on the moon," she said. "Nice, isn't it?"

Gentle, her smile. But a bit strained, too. And her fears were justified. "Not getting me on the moon," Grandpa said firmly. "Not at my time of life."

"But you would soon settle down," Mother said, all sweetness and patience. "Look how you grumbled when we took you to Llandudno that time. Yet you enjoyed it ever so much when we got there."

The old gentleman pointed his pipe-stem at Mother, very accusing. "Two things the Almighty made the moon for, girl. Poaching and lovemaking. If He had meant it for living on He would have built it a damn sight nearer."

Glared over *The Advertiser* at that, did my father. And Grandpa glared back. Daggers drawn, those two. But the old man went on, "Not so bad when it is full, maybe. But what about when it is just a little sickle? All jammed together round the edges like sardines, I shouldn't wonder."

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Mother sighed. But my father put down his paper. "Well, you can take your choice," he said unfeelingly. "It is either that or the Pen y Graig Home."

Settled any argument, that did. Temperamentally opposed to Homes was Grandpa. He plumped, mutinously, for the moon.

But a hard man, my father.

I had my problem, too. Mari Trevor. There was a girl to make the moon seem a far and forlorn place. Up the white road to the Trevor farm I went that evening, heart like lead, with my future home grinning and mocking at me and lighting my way.

Mari herself opened the door, with a smile to lift the heart. Then she saw my face. "Why, Iestyn, there is sad you are."

Out into the moonlight she came. "What is it, boy?" she asked, gentle as a cooing dove.

Hard it is to say the words that lift the sorrow from your own heart to seize the heart of a loved one. "Leaving the district, we are," I said, very quiet.

Silence, then. I felt her hands in mine, frightened. "Going far, is it?"

"The moon," I said.

A gasp and a sigh like the night wind on the mountains. We both looked up at the moon. Still grinning it was, pleased as Punch.

"Could have been worse," I pointed out. "Could have been Mars."

Not much comfort there, it seemed. She was crying, now, making small, helpless noises like a hurt puppy. "I will come with you," she murmured.

"No place for you," I said, remembering her on the mountains, with the wind in her laughing mouth, and the sun and the wind running their fingers through her dark hair. Not one to have to go everywhere with a damned great goldfish bowl on her head, that girl. "Couldn't leave your mother to work the farm alone, either," I said.

"But you'll come back, Iestyn?" She clung to me as though I might even then take wings and fly to the moon.

"I'll come back," I said, not knowing how or when.

Sad is the plight of the lover who must take the road that ends among the stars. Sad for grandfathers, too. Never really settled down on the moon, did the old man.

Made up his mind not to like it from the start, Dad said, nasty. Didn't try to adapt himself. But Mother said, "Well,

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what can you expect, him never having been outside Wales in his life except for a day trip to Birmingham when he was forty-seven? Asking too much, it is." She sighed. "But, as you said yourself, it was either this or Pen y Graig. And verging on the fanciful, it is, to think of Grandpa ending his days in a Home."

Like Mam, that was. Never an unkind word, always understanding, even of those who gave her the most trouble. And Grandpa certainly gave her that. Oh, never a dull moment. Leaving the airlock open every time he went down the garden. Slipping out to get a paper in the mid-month sun and coming home damned near fried. Going out without his gravity-boots and having to be lassoed and hauled back to moon like, as Dad put it, a seventy-five-year-old Chinese kite.

That was what really upset Dad about Grandpa. No dignity. Like a scraggy, friendly little terrier; all grins and tail-wagging, but off like a scalded cat at the word "bath." And to see Grandpa leering at us from the bar window of The Space-Traveller's Rest as we walked, all dignity and polish, to Zion, made my father boil proper. I think he would have suffered every discomfort of Moon-life gladly, if he could have been spared the discomfort of having Grandfather around.

And Moon-life *had* plenty of discomfort in those early days. When you weren't being roasted you were frozen. When you weren't groping your way through the long night you were being blinded by a cruel sun. Meteorites clattering on the roof like demented hail. Endless bickerings with the Russian Sector. And not a cow in sight. Condensed milk it was, breakfast, tea, and supper—and like it.

But we are seldom content with the troubles that old Nature provides for us. Usually making a few of our own as well. And that was how it was with us. Dad irritated beyond endurance by Grandfather. Mother sad for the green hills of Wales. And me, Iestyn, mooning on the moon for the white arms and the smiling lips of Mari Trevor, a quarter of a million miles away in Merionethshire.

Oh, long is the highway from Earth to Moon, and deep and dark the gulf between earthbound and moonbound lovers. If that old Romeo had been banished here he would have had something to moan about, and no mistake. But there it was. Mari, walking in the soft night air, sighing to the moon. And me, Iestyn, on the arid mountains, holding out my arms to the shining earth.

But enough of my troubles, isn't it. Back to Grandfather, now.

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There was no hint of disaster, on the night disaster came. Doing *Elijah*, they were, at Zion, and a fine old bustle as we got ready to go to the concert. In the chorus, Dad was, and fine he looked in his dark suit, all six feet of him, and his beard trim and grey as a frosted hedge at home. And Mother, brushing his coat, proud as Lucifer of her husband. Proud I was, too. Not one for oratorio usually, mind, but going just to see my dad among the baritones.

"Ready is it, then?" asked Mother, making for the airlock. Then she saw Grandfather. Still in his carpet slippers! "Keeping us waiting, you will be," she said reproachfully.

"Not coming," he said. "Keeping the fire warm for you, tonight."

Funny, that. Not one to miss anything, usually, even if it was only oratorio. But there was no arguing with him tonight. Just spread his feet to the blaze and hid behind the *News of the Universe* (Moon Edition).

"Come on then," said my father, secretly pleased not to have Grandfather in the audience, chortling and fidgeting and champing peppermints. "No slipping out to The Traveller's, mind," he called over his shoulder.

Sly, Grandpa looked. Then back behind the Moon Edition, like a terrier burrowing into his basket.

"Up to something," muttered my father, zipping up his electrically-heated suit.

Very pretty the concert was, with every sweet chord plucking my heart strings with memories of Mari. Mari on the hills of springtime, Mari gentle as September evenings in the valley, Mari sweet as the summer's sun.

Then it was over, with good nights all round, and "You go straight home, Dai bach," and "You remember *Messiah* in Dinas Corn Exchange?" and "Cold for the time of year, isn't it, Mrs. Pugh?"

Cold it *was*, too. Not that the time of year had much to do with it. No blessed spring or winter in this forsaken outpost of empire. Getting pretty desperate, I was, in my new surroundings. And the music just made everything seem worse, as music can do. No Mari. No rivers for swimming, no brooks for leaping, no birds for singing, no meadows of grass, no soft April rain. No Mari.

No Grandpa, either. When we came home the house was empty. Not in the parlour, not in the kitchen, not in his room. Not down the garden. Mother looked at the peg behind the door and tut-tutted. "Gone without his muffler, too," she said.

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" Tickling up his bronchial tubes, proper, the night air will be."

Very angry, my father was. " Knew he was up to something," he said. " Off to The Traveller's, I bet, the moment our backs were turned."

Closing time came. No Grandpa. Father and I went out to look for him, out into the awful cold and silence of the lunar night. Nothing. Only the brilliance of the stars, and Earth like a great gold pumpkin. And a nothingness that got into your bones. We came home. " Gone," said my father. " Neither sight nor sound."

" Might have fallen in a crater, poor lamb," Mother said, worried to death.

" Nothing to do but wait for dawn, a week on Monday," said my father. Very resigned, he was.

Grandpa did not come back. Anxiously, we waited for the dawn. " Not seen anything of Grandpa, I suppose? " Mother would ask every customer who came into the shop. And the answer was always the same. A shake of the head. Grandpa had been swallowed, without trace, by the lunar night.

Dawn came at last.

Oh, beautiful is dawn on the moon. Not stealing gently, as on earth. But coming with a bang, almost like a lightning flash. One second, darkness. The next, brilliance, with the jagged mountains as bright and unreal as stage scenery, and the craters pools of black shadow, and the mercury rising fast enough in the thermometer to shoot out at the top.

My father and I already had on our climbing-boots. Down into the nearest crater we went, roped, sheer for a bit and the rocks already hot enough to fetch the skin off, then down into waist-deep dust and the chill gloom of the bottom. Not much like climbing Snowdon. Oh, eerie it is at the base of a moon crater, ringed by rocks like the walls of ancient fortresses, half buried in dust as old as the universe.

" Grandpa," we shouted.

" Grandpa," the beetling walls replied. The rest was silence.

" Come on," said my father grimly. " Better try the next one."

But that was not so easy. One thing getting into a moon crater. Quite another getting out, we found. We would climb so far up the sides and then fall back regular as clockwork, like earwigs in a basin.

And getting hotter every minute. Frightening, it was. I thought of Mari, waiting for me on the cool earth, while I perished like a trapped insect on the burning desert of the moon. " Mari! " I shouted. " Mari."

And the high cliffs shouted, " Mari."

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And my limbs turning to water, and everything going black, myself entering the black tunnel of eternity.

Then there was another shout. "Mr. Pugh. Mr. Pugh, is it?"

We looked up. There, over the edge of the crater, like sunrise on the mountains, the red face of Constable Evans! And a rope snaking down into the abyss.

"Thank you, Constable," panted my father, as we were hauled to safety.

But very official, Constable Evans was. "Are you acquainted with one Llewelyn Protheroe?" he asked.

"You know damn well he's my father-in-law," Dad said.

The Constable hung his head. "Got bad news for you, then, Thomas Pugh."

My father sighed. "We had feared the worst," he said bravely. "Where did you find the—remains?"

"Who is talking of remains? Alive and kicking, the old gentleman is. But in the Russian Sector, held for spying, and the wires red hot between London and Moscow. An International Incident, Llewelyn Protheroe has become," he ended, very dramatic.

Often have I seen my father furious. But never as furious as he was now. "Duw," he cried. "The old fool slips out to The Traveller's, gets lost coming home, stumbles into the Russian Sector, gets picked up, and they think he's a spy!" He laughed, very mirthless. "Must have a pretty poor opinion of the British Secret Service."

"Interesting to see the headlines, though," mused Constable Evans, who was of a literary turn of mind. "MOON DWELLER HELD IN RUSSIAN SECTOR in *The Times*, and RUSSIANS GRAB MOON GRANDAD in the *Mirror*."

Groaned, my father did. I think he had always feared Grandpa would bring disgrace and ridicule on his head. But even he could not have realised he would do it in the world's headlines.

But the following day a strange thing happened. The Russians marched Grandfather as far as the frontier wire, turned him loose without a word, and the international temperature went back to normal, or as near normal as it ever got in those days. Very intrigued, the newspapers were. But my father's private theory was that even the Russians could not stand more than a fortnight of Grandpa.

We were just starting tea when he sidled in, humming snatches of *The Volga Boat Song*, pretending nothing had happened. But very sheepish he looked.

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" Oh, Grandpa," Mother cried, throwing her arms about him. " There is worried we have been."

" Worried? " He tried to look surprised. " Just a little misunderstanding, Betsi." He sat down, sighing, and unlaced his gravity-boots. " Very ignorant, those Russians. Tried 'em in English. Tried 'em in Welsh. Didn't cotton on to a word." He cocked a wary eye at my father, who had not spoken yet.

But suddenly my father gave his boiled egg a tremendous crack with the spoon. Wishing it was Grandpa, I shouldn't wonder. " You have brought disgrace on the names of Pugh and Protheroe," he cried. He leapt to his feet and snatched up the papers, pushed them under Grandpa's nose. " Look! "

MOON INCIDENT THREAT TO WORLD PEACE

SPARE AGED FATHER PLEADS STRICKEN MOON DAUGHTER

Very interested, the old man was. " Well, there is grand," he said. " Me sitting there, drinking vodka and teaching them *Land of My Fathers*, friendly as you please, and all the time the newspapers busy making mountains out of molehills."

" This is no molehill, Llewelyn Protheroe." Terrible, my father's voice was. " But it is the last time you drag my name in the mire. Already I have written to the matron of Pen y Graig, and she has replied that, if you should be released, she would be glad to have you in the Home. God help her," he ended fervently.

Consternation then, and no mistake. " Thomas, you could not do anything so cruel," cried my mother.

" Couldn't I? " asked my father, smiling tight-lipped.

" Be the death of the old man, sending him down there," said Mother.

" Be the death of me if he stays up here," said Father. He banged his fist on the table. " If Constable Evans had come five minutes later, Iestyn and I would both have perished searching for this old fool at the bottom of a moon crater. True or false, Iestyn boy? "

" True," I said. Not wanting to let the old man down, mind. But at the words " Pen y Graig " my heart had leapt as it seldom leapt these days. If Grandpa was going back to earth you couldn't make him up into a parcel and send him registered. No. Someone would have to take him, otherwise he'd probably land up in the Kremlin. And if anyone was going to earth, well, why shouldn't it be me? Trembling with excitement already, I was.

Grandfather hadn't said a word. Just sat looking punctured, as though the shades of the Home were already closing about him. But Mother hadn't finished yet. " There is a hard man

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you are, Thomas Pugh, and riding roughshod over me all our life together." She stood up, and the rare anger of a sweet and gentle woman made her magnificent. "But I will not let you send my father where he does not wish to go."

"And I say he *shall* go," roared my father. Never had I seen them like this before. Always my mother would give way to keep the peace. But not this time. And I knew my father was rattled. Didn't quite know how to deal with determined opposition. Hadn't had much practice, see.

And there was I, hoping Father would win because I longed for a chance to go to Earth and see Mari; and hoping Mother would win because I was so sorry for Grandpa. Oh, very crest-fallen the old man was looking, more like a little dog than ever, tail well between his legs, showing the whites of his eyes, and trying to pretend he isn't there.

Mother sat down again. Put her elbows on the table and her chin in her hands. Spoke very quietly. "Very well, Thomas Your word is law, always has been. But if Grandpa goes back to Earth, I go too." Taken aback at that, my father was.

But he set his palms on the table, leaned over her, and hissed, "Till death us do part, remember?"

Mother faced him bravely. "I have been a good and gentle wife to you, Thomas. I am a soft woman, and you have always bent me to your will." Then her voice began to rise, to strengthen. "But by God I am a Welsh woman and the blood of Glendower is in my veins and if you push me too far you will regret it with tears, Thomas Pugh. With bitter tears." And she picked up the teapot and flung it with all her force at the wall, where it smashed into a hundred pieces.

Settled my father, that did. White as a sheet, and trembling. Licking his lips while he sought for words. "No need to make a scene, now, good girl, is there?" he said, very ingratiating. "The last thing I would wish would be to send your father away if he wants to stay on here." He tried to give Grandpa a smile of pure friendliness. Grandfather bared his teeth back.

"Well, that is all right, then," said Mother. "What are we arguing about, eh?"

Heavy silence. Dad breathing loudly, Grandpa pretending he wasn't there, me still eating boiled egg and bread and butter, Mother staring unseeing at the wall where the teapot landed.

It was Mother who broke the silence. "Look at that damned mess," she said, and went quietly into hysterics.

"Bed, me," said Grandpa, and escaped under cover of the uproar.

Well, there was an evening for you. And it was a miserable

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Iestyn Pugh who went to bed that night, I can tell you. For just about five minutes I had seen myself going back to all the lovely things of Earth, to the loveliest things of all on Earth, the arms of my girl, Mari Trevor. For just about five minutes hope had not only sprung in my breast. It had positively gushed. And then, all in a moment—finish. Like treading on a hosepipe.

A long time I lay awake, tormented by longings—not only for Mari, but for all the green and gentle things of Earth. And then—what is this? A scrabbling at the door. The handle turns. In comes Grandpa in his striped pyjamas, very undignified.

He sat down on my bed, slapped his palms down on his knees, and sighed. " Getting a bit tired of this old moon, boy."

" Me, too," I said, sitting up.

" Between you and me, Iestyn, and you'll forgive me saying so—between you and me I don't much care for your Dad either—never have."

" What is on your mind, Grandpa? " I asked.

Looked at me searchingly, he did. " Me for the Pen y Graig Home, Iestyn," he said. " And going under my own steam, not being gaoled by Mr. Thomas Pugh, Esquire."

" But you'd never find your way there, Grandpa," I said. " Spaceship to London. Then train to Wales. Half a dozen changes. Get lost, you would."

" Not if you took me, boy."

I felt the bed trembling with my excitement. But this was ridiculous. The wild fancy of an old man. Suddenly I was miserable again. " But the spaceship fare? It's impossible."

" Got a bit tucked away, boy. Enough for a single for me and a tourist return for you."

Out of bed I was now, my mind made up, brain racing, flinging things into a suitcase. " Make it two singles, Grandpa," I cried. "And for heaven's sake get dressed. The spaceship leaves in an hour."

Out of the sleeping house on tiptoe then, notes left on the dresser, and legging it for the Space Station. Oh, the excitement of it, two singles to London, please, and into the great ship, and fasten your safety-belts and a bit of barley sugar from a pretty space-hostess, though not as pretty as Mari, and then, whoosh, off we go on the first leg of our journey from the moon to Merionethshire.

A long journey that, and tedious; especially the last bit from Dinas Junction to Pen y Graig Halt, stopping at every station. Time to think of many things. To wonder why I had not had

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the courage to tell my parents what I intended. But there had been no time. Couldn't risk missing the spaceship, could I.

Time to wonder about Mari. Perhaps she no longer loved me, perhaps she was married, perhaps she had gone far away. Could be dead, even. My heart froze at the awful possibilities.

Then at last the train sidled into Pen y Graig Halt. We stepped out on to the platform. And my heart was too full for any words. A soft rain was falling, sighing in the fir trees, and the clouds were low on the mountains. The little train pottered off into the trees. And the evening was soft, and still, and damp, and infinitely sad. Oh, if ever you are tired of life on earth try living on the moon for a bit. When you come back the sheer loveliness of Earth, whether in sunlight or rain or frost or snow, will catch you by the throat, and you will see it as very heaven. That is how I felt, as I tasted the rain on my lips and saw the pine needles hung with diamonds.

Grandpa seemed less impressed. "Not changed much while we've been away," he said, looking round. He picked up his suitcase, and set off.

Eagerly I went with him. I could not wait to get the old man settled. And what with form-filling and so on it was late evening before I walked at last with him to the front door.

"Good-bye, Iestyn," he said. Eyes a bit bright, I thought.

"Good-bye, Grandpa." We shook hands. "Hope you will like it here," I said. I wanted to say something else. But there was nothing more to say. I set off down the drive.

I knew the old man was in the doorway, staring after me. Never before had I noticed how wizened he was. But sorry though I was for Grandpa, I soon forgot him. Here I was, back on Earth, and nothing left to do but hurry to the arms of my beloved. With a joyous heart I took the road to Trevor farm.

The rain had gone away now, and the sky was breaking to let the last rays of the sun bless the valleys and smile on the hills. Up the bracken-fringed road I went, and there at last before me the big farm, its windows ablaze in the sunset.

Blind windows. The blind windows of an empty house, and the door gaping like a smashed mouth.

"Mari," I cried, in the crumbling house. "Mari." And the rats ran in the rafters and the bats squeaked in the gloom. Out I came like one mad, out into the wet and yellow sunset, out into the wilderness of garden. All the way from the moon I had come, to find a house forsaken and given over to decay. And my love gone.

And I, a Moon dweller, alone on an earth just slipping into the dark, was afraid; lonely and afraid. I must have lights,

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and company. Down the hill I went, running now, watched by a hundred wild eyes, wishing I were back in the safety of the lifeless moon.

Lights, and company. There was only one place on earth now where I could find those, now that my love was gone. Up the drive of the Pen y Graig Home I went, and hammering on the door in panic flight from the wild, teeming Earth-night. A nurse opened the door. One I had not seen on my earlier visit. Startled, she looked. Then, "Iestyn," she cried, and her arms were all about me, and her lips on mine, and both of us crying to fill buckets.

Well, there is unexpected, you will say. Whatever was Mari doing nursing at Pen y Graig? Last we heard of her she was helping her mother on the farm.

But her mother died, and no one wanted the farm, and Mari had to take a job. Enjoyed the nursing, too. Till I came. Then decided she would rather marry me.

And blessed we are indeed, with me working for the Gas Board, and a little house on the edge of the town, and Grandpa dropping in at the weekends, happy as a sandboy, let out on parole as he puts it. And as well as my sweet Mari I have the seasons, seedtime and harvest, morning and evening, night and day. Who could ask more?

I have the sun by day. And the moon in the sky by night.

The moon in the sky. Best place for it, too, if you ask me. Better than having the old thing under your feet, boy.

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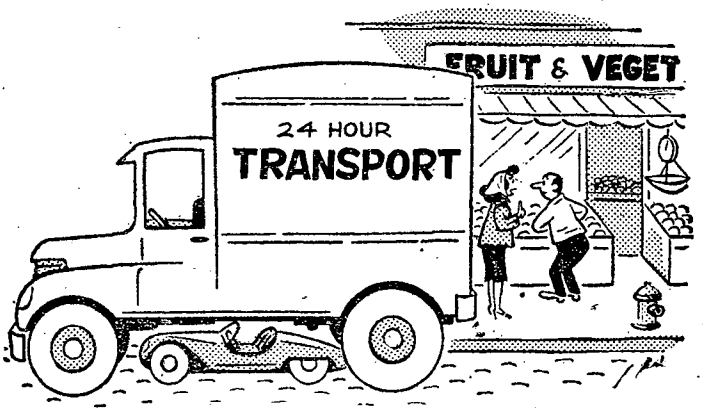

"Could you hurry, please? I'm double parked."

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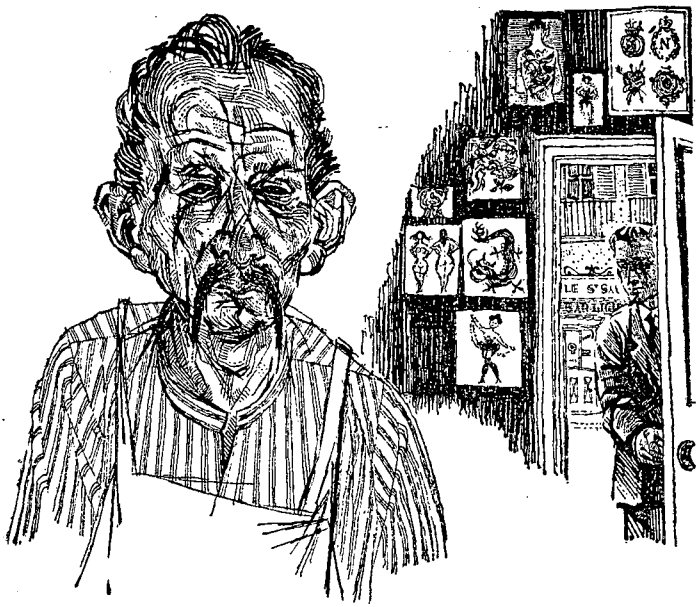

TATTOO PATTERN

THE headquarters of the Department of Patterns is in a rather ramshackle old house on the Quai d'Orsay. The permanent staff is little more than a dozen, split among the four sub-departments which concern themselves with civil, military, criminal, and international affairs. Chief of the whole department is Monsieur Alphonse Grand—Papa Grand.

Papa Grand has an attic room to himself with a small window that looks out over the Seine. You go to Papa Grand only when you are on to something which seems like the beginning of a good pattern.

The department doesn't come directly under any ministry but it works closely with them all. There are a lot of files marked *Unsolved* in the police archives. Our department has time—all the time in the world—to spend on small things that surprisingly

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Don't have yourself tattooed (who knows, even "I love Ethel" may lead to trouble some day) seems to be the moral of Victor Canning's story in his brilliant new detective series starring Papa Grand of the Quai d'Orsay.

Victor Canning lives in Kent where he grows carnations, breeds Gordon setters, and writes exotic thrillers; he holidayed last year in the south of France collecting material, but gave the Pont du Gard a miss.

BY VICTOR CANNING

often turn out to be big things in the making. We just work away at random and then, every now and then, a lot of little things add up to a pattern.

Take a case in point. I'd been seconded from Criminal Jurisdiction for a two-year spell with the Department of Patterns. Every year six or eight young men from various government departments get this honour—and it is an honour. Well, I'd been put on escaped prisoners. Every year men escape from prison and penal settlements in France and her dependencies—and quite a few are never heard of again. More than you would imagine. For two days I'd been going through lists of men who'd escaped over the last three years. Suddenly something in one of the lists rang a faint bell in my memory. In the department, when a bell rings, no matter how faintly, you pay attention to it.

Three days later I felt that I had enough material to take to Papa Grand. He was sitting, half turned away from his desk, with his feet up on the windowsill. He was a big, solid-looking man, over sixty, whitehaired, with a fresh Norman complexion, and bright blue eyes that always had a little crinkle of smile around them—until you made a mistake. He always wore a high stiff oldfashioned collar.

He looked at me without saying anything for a moment and then slowly fished out his snuffbox and took a pinch. The middle finger was missing from his right hand and the skin on the back of his hand was badly scarred—though how it had happened no one knew.

Then he said pleasantly, "Well, Belain, are you missing the excitements of your old department?"

"No, patron. It is a pleasure to eat at regular hours."

I took the file from under my arm and put it on his desk.

"Three years ago, patron, two men escaped from a penal

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settlement outside Conakry in French Guinea. They have never been heard of since. One was Marcel Vannes, aged forty, and the other François Delapide, forty-two. Both were serving sentences for murder committed in Guinea. They broke into a bank and killed the watchman, when they were disturbed. They were old friends from Paris. And in the details of their descriptions it says that they were both tattooed on the chest.

"Marcel Vannes had the head and shoulders of a musketeer with the word *Athos* under it, and François Delapide a musketeer's head marked *Porthos*. It was this that brought to my memory an incident which occurred while I was doing some work on suicides when I first came to this department."

"Which was?"

"That two years ago the body of a man was pulled out of the River Gardon near Remoulins. His face had been mutilated by rocks and boulders in the stream and he was never identified. But on his chest was a tattoo of a musketeer with the word *Aramis* under it. There's a police photograph of it in the file, very much blown up."

I watched as Papa Grand took out the photograph and then reached into a drawer for a magnifying glass. He bent over the photograph, studying it closely. Then, without looking at me, he said, "Age?"

"About forty, the police doctor reported."

"I see. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. The Three Musketeers. You think there was a connection between Aramis and the others?"

"There could have been, patron. Three close friends, say. One day they all decide to get tattooed. Maybe when they were much younger. Also—"

Papa Grand's head came up and he was smiling. "Belain, I like the way you say, 'also.' You do not know it, but you say it in exactly the same way as all the young men who work here. I am so used to it. That 'also' means you have saved the titbit until last."

"Yes, patron. Nearly a year ago—this, too, I remembered from the suicide work I was doing—an elderly man was taken from the Rhône near Avignon. His name was Otto Raventhal. He was staying in Avignon on holiday without his wife. She testified that he had many gambling debts and it was assumed that he had committed suicide. For thirty years he had run a small tattooing salon, if that is the word, here in Paris. It was the tattoo element in all this which intrigued me."

"And me, Belain. Aramis is dead. Athos and Porthos have disappeared. And a tattooist is dead. Aramis comes out of the

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river near Remoulins, and the tattooist out of the Rhône not so far away at Avignon, but a year later. Maybe someone in that district dislikes tattoos? What have you done?"

"Nothing, patron, except to check that Madame Raventhal still runs the tattooing business in Paris."

"You should have a talk with her." He handed me back the file. "The Aramis tattoo was certainly done by Otto Raventhal."

"You are sure, patron?" I showed my surprise.

"Yes, Belain, I am sure. Men of art are proud of their work." He gave me his twinkling blue-eyed smile. "If you look at the design through a magnifying glass you will see that he has worked his initials, *O.R.*, into the embroidery of Aramis' collar."

"I am sorry, patron." It was a mark against me.

"Never mind, Belain. Go and see the widow. Maybe you will get a trip to the south, far away from this Paris weather."

So I went to see Madame Raventhal. She owned a small house in a shabby sidestreet quite close to the Gare du Nord. The tattooing salon was on the ground floor.

There was an assistant in the salon, a man of nearly fifty I guessed, in an apron and shirtsleeves, and with carpet slippers on his feet. His shoulders were bent up, and to make a long, lugubrious face more sad he wore a drooping pair of black moustaches like an unkempt Chinese mandarin. He said he was Madame's assistant, and went away to fetch her.

I waited, studying the various tattoo designs pinned round the walls. There were naked women of all shapes, sizes, and nationalities; sailing ships; dragons; hearts and crosses; daggers and swords; and a mixture of regimental crests from half a dozen armies, but there were no musketeers.

Madame Raventhal came back by herself. She was a tall, gaunt, broomstick creature of about sixty, sniffing with a cold and not at all friendly. I explained that I was from the police—all the department staff carry police credentials—and that we were trying to establish the identity of a man pulled out of the River Gardon two years before. As he was tattooed on the chest, we were checking with all the tattooists in France.

"It was a tattoo of Aramis—one of the three musketeers, madame. Have you or your husband ever obliged anyone with such a design?"

"Certainly not me, monsieur. I do not do tattoo work. Since my husband's death it has been carried on by an assistant I employ. And I am sure he has not done one. We keep a record of all our work and I see the record every day."

"You keep records? Did your husband also keep records?"

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"Yes, monsieur. Always."

"Then perhaps I may be allowed to inspect them?"

"They go back many years."

"The dead man was about forty. The tattoo could have been done as long as twenty years ago."

She took me into a small office behind the salon and got out a stack of dusty day books. I sat down to go through them. It was a tedious job and Madame Raventhal kept popping in to keep an eye on me. Long, tedious jobs are part of the department's work, and at the end of four hours I found what I wanted. For a day in June, fifteen years before, there was this entry.

> *One each of three musketeers: Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. Quite one of my best bits of work. Marcel and two of his friends, François Delapide and Jean Autey.*

There followed a note of the price paid.

I asked Madame Raventhal if her husband had ever had a friend called Marcel Vannes. "No, monsieur. The name means nothing."

I thanked her, and the assistant showed me out. At the door he sidled up to me and said, "Police? What's the old girl been up to? Always thought it was funny about her husband. Not like him. Couldn't stand water at any price."

I said, "You knew him?"

"Sure. Took me into his business. Joined him not long before he died. What you here for, anyway?"

"Just a routine inquiry. Bonjour, monsieur."

After that it was a question of digging for facts. I sent a cable to French Guinea asking for a check of the customs control records to see whether a Jean Autey had ever visited the former colony. I also informed the police of the Departement of Gard that the man pulled out of the river near Remoulins had been Jean Autey, and asked them to try to trace if anyone of that name had lived or stayed in the area. I also put his name into our stew-pot.

Managing the stew-pot is the first job you ever get in the department. A name is given to you and then you spend hours and days going through every conceivable kind of record from all the ministries: Justice, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Armed Forces, War Veterans, Construction, Posts and Telegraphs, the whole boiling, and there are nearly twenty of them, hoping that something will turn up. Two out of every five people coming into the department for training never survive the stew-pot. Some, though I cannot vouch for this, are said to have gone mad. I can believe it. But the system works. And it worked this time.

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Nearly two weeks later I asked to see Papa Grand. When I went in to see him, I was surprised to find him sitting back in his chair solemnly regarding a tortoise about the size of a small dinnerplate which was slowly taking a stroll round his desk.

"Ha, Belain," he greeted me affably, "let me introduce you to my friend, Slow but Sure. You know how many of these are imported into France each year from Africa? No, of course not. But a great many. Does he look like an ordinary tortoise to you?"

"He seems so, patron."

"But he is not." He reached forward and tapped the creature's shell. "On the top of his real shell, Belain, a false shell has been skilfully glued and the empty space between the two holds nearly four ounces of anything you like to put in it. In this case, drugs. The race is not to the swift. Now, how are our three musketeers doing?"

"I've made some progress, patron."

I began to give him all my facts. The police at Remoulins hadn't been able to trace any Jean Autey. But from French Guinea I had been informed that Jean Autey had arrived there nearly eight years ago and had left a year later. He had arrived on the same boat as the other two musketeers, Vannes and Delapide, and had left six months before they were imprisoned.

But the best bit of news had come out of the stew-pot. A Jean Autey had changed his name by legal process to that of Leon Vaillard four years ago, and his address was given as Château le Pouzin, Remoulins. The house was still registered in the Commune records under that name.

Papa Grand listened to all this without interruption, and then when I had finished he took up the tortoise and leaned back in his chair, nursing it.

"So, Belain, what picture do we get?"

"Possibly, patron, these three men were all friends. Fifteen years ago they all get tattooed. They are a little band. Seven years later they all go to French Guinea. To do what, I do not know. But a year later Jean Autey leaves alone.

"The other two shortly after try to rob a bank and go to prison. Back in France, a year before the men escape from prison, Autey changes his name. Possibly he fears they will escape and look for him. So he covers his trail. Then they escape. And not long afterwards Aramis alias Jean Autey alias Leon Vaillard is pulled drowned out of a river. Was this revenge for something, patron?"

Papa Grand shrugged his shoulders. Then he put the tortoise back on the desk and picked up a sheet of paper.

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"You have not seen today's police bulletin, Belain? No? Well, there is an item of interest in it. This morning a man was found by the roadside near St Denis. The victim, it is thought, of a hit-and-run motorist, his face was badly damaged, and he had no identification papers. But on his chest he had a tattoo of a musketeer with the word *Athos* under it. I have asked for a photograph of the tattoo and the police are sending it up. So, Belain, Aramis is dead, so is Athos. Where is Porthos?"

"I think, patron, he might be at the Château le Pouzin."

"So do I, Belain. You had better take a trip to the south. And do not do too much on your own. It is always a temptation. The moment you have enough information for the police to act, go to them. I will let them know you are in Remoulins." He tapped his fingers together. "Three swashbuckling friends who go to French Guinea. What could they be going for, Belain? Use your imagination, Belain . . . One comes back, he changes his name, and he lives in a château. Think, Belain. Life is larger than fiction, but the patterns are similar."

"No, patron, I do not know."

"Then walk down the Rue de Rivoli and look in the jewellers' shops. Diamonds, Belain. There are diamonds in Guinea, and there is a lot of illicit digging. You would like a little wager on this?"

I smiled. "Not with you, patron."

"A pity."

The next day I motored down to Remoulins, reaching it just before dark. In one of the local cafés I learnt that the Château le Pouzin was about three kilometres from Remoulins, standing on a rocky bluff overlooking the River Gardon.

It was dark when I reached it, sweeping through tall iron gateways and up a stretch of dusty drive. I got an impression of slate-tiled turrets and gables, and the whole building was surrounded by tall pine trees. There were no lights showing from the château. I rang the bell and waited. I had to ring twice more before a light went on in the hall and the door opened.

Against the light I made out a woman in evening dress, tall, willowy, and with blonde hair piled in an elaborate coiffure. A trace of expensive perfume drifted towards me.

I said, "May I speak to Monsieur Vaillard?"

She shook her head. I could not see her face clearly. "Monsieur Vaillard is away. I am Madame Vaillard."

"Then may I talk to you, madame?" Seeing her hesitation, I went on, "I am from the police, madame. Paris. We wish to make a few inquiries." I pulled out my pass. She took it and

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half turned to the light to examine it. I knew from her manner that she didn't want to let me in. But there was nothing she could do.

I was taken down the hall and shown into a small sitting-room. I saw her then clearly as she sat down on a settee and motioned me to a chair. She was about forty, still beautiful—the kind of woman you would turn to watch in a crowd.

I said, "Where is your husband, madame?"

There was a moment's hesitation and then she said, "He is in South America, I believe. He has been away for two years."

"You receive letters from him?"

"No, monsieur."

"Isn't that unusual?"

She smiled. "No, monsieur. We are not exactly on good terms with one another. Also, I will be frank with you, I am not really his wife. He is an odd man. He goes away, sometimes for a year, two years, and then comes back. Sometimes we are reconciled and sometimes not. But I stay here and the arrangement suits us both."

"You live here alone?"

"With my brother. He is changing for dinner at the moment."

I stood up. "I'm sorry to tell you, madame, that Monsieur Vaillard was drowned in the Gardon two years ago. He has only recently been identified and traced and—"

But I got no further. At this moment there was the crash of a shot being fired somewhere in the upper rooms of the château. I turned to the door, but Madame Vaillard was there before me, flinging it open and running across the hall to the stairs. I followed her, taking out my automatic.

On the top floor a door was half open, a light streaming from it. I overtook her at the door and went in ahead of her.

It was a bedroom, and across the room was another open door giving me a glimpse of a bathroom. Between the bed and the bathroom door a man, naked except for a pair of silk drawers and a dressing-gown, lay on the floor, and one arm was outflung with a baby Browning resting in the palm of his hand. He was dead; a neat bullet hole drilled through his right temple.

As I bent over him I knew at once who he was. He had just taken a bath and the dressing-gown fell back from his naked chest. On it a musketeer was tattooed, with the word *Porthos* beneath.

I stood up and turned to Madame Vaillard. She was staring down at the body, breathing heavily, and there was no doubt about her shock and distress.

I took her arm and led her to a chair and then got a glass of

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water for her from the bathroom. When she had drunk some of it, I said, "I think, madame, the time has come for you to talk. Your brother, as you call him, has committed suicide. I want to know all about Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. All of them are dead. Yes, Athos quite recently in Paris."

I got it from her, slowly but truthfully. The three men had gone to Guinea and had engaged in illicit diamond digging. She had met them in some night haunt where she had been a singer. The men had made a big strike, but Aramis had double-crossed the other two. He had gone off with nearly three hundred thousand pounds' worth of stones—and he had taken her with him, and soon changed his name.

Meanwhile the other two, needing money to go after him, had robbed a bank and landed up in prison. They had escaped, but soon afterwards had quarrelled and separated. Porthos traced Aramis first, killed him, and threw him into the river, faking a drowning.

Madame Vaillard promptly switched musketeers. They had lived happily for some time until Otto Raventhal had turned up at the château. He had come from Athos, who had kept track of Porthos, and he told him that he would be exposed as an escaped prisoner unless Athos' share of the diamonds was handed over. Porthos had dealt with Otto Raventhal in the same way as he had handled Aramis—as a warning to Athos to keep clear of him.

"And the diamonds?" I asked her.

"Only about a third of them were sold. The rest of them are in a safe in the library. He—" she looked towards the dead man—"has the key. But why should he commit suicide?"

"He didn't, madame!"

A man's voice came from the bedroom door behind me. Something crashed on my head and I went out into darkness.

I came to slowly and I realised that I was being carried between two people. My hands and ankles were bound. For a while all I knew was that it was dark and that I was being taken over rough ground among bushes and trees. I caught a whiff of her perfume, and knew that Madame Vaillard was helping to carry me. A man's hands were round my shoulders and under my arms. Occasionally the woman briefly flashed a torch to pick out the path. I gave no sign that I had regained consciousness. They carried me slowly and laboriously, dumping me to give themselves a respite now and then, but it was too dark for me to make out the details of the man.

At one resting-point Madame Vaillard said quietly, "And what happens after this?"

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"You go your way. I go mine. I need no partner. You can have a quarter of the stones. Generous, eh?"

"He is from the police, you know."

"I don't care who he is. He goes over the Pont du Gard. We free his hands and feet and give him a hundred-and-sixty-foot drop into the river. Who cares?"

At that I nearly gave myself away. The Pont du Gard! Of course, the house must be quite close to it. It was the old Roman aqueduct over the Gardon which had once taken water to Nîmes, soaring high above the river, its great span and towering arches a famous tourist sight. You could walk across it in the water tunnel or over the top of the tunnel on the wide stone slabs—if you had a good head for heights.

A few minutes later and they had taken me down the slight cliff slope to the entrance to the aqueduct. There was only one hope for me, only one move which could save me from the deadly drop into the boulder-strewn river. I must wait for the moment when they released my hands and feet and then make my bid. They hoisted me on to the first of the great slabs that roofed the aqueduct and I could see nothing below me but a great blackness.

As I lay there the man said, "All right. We'll take his cords off here and then drag him to the middle. But we'll take no chances. He's been out some time. He might come round when he hits the water. I'll crack his head again so that he'll never come round. Look the other way if you're squeamish."

He laughed gently and bent towards me and I saw his hand rise over me with something in it. I rolled then, twisting towards him, crashing my body against his feet. But he laughed and a hand grabbed my throat, steadying me.

"Foxing, eh?" He laughed again. Then as the laugh died, the blackness of the night about us was suddenly ablaze from four or five powerful police torches. A crowd of figures threw themselves on the man and Madame Vaillard. In the light I saw the man's face—long, drooping moustaches—the tattooist's assistant from Paris!

Later, back at the château, Papa Grand brought me a brandy. My hand shook as I took it. A police inspector from Remoulins was in the room with us.

Papa Grand smiled at me. "It was a near thing, Belain. Very near. I told you that a good artist always signs his work. When I got the photographs of the Athos tattoo on the dead man from St Denis—this was after you left—I found that it wasn't signed *O.R.* So it wasn't the real Athos. The real Athos

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has just been taken off, and before he went we inspected the authentic tattoo on his chest. Signed *O.R.*

"The real Athos, gone to ground with Otto Raventhal, decided—after his first blackmailing attempt had failed—to make a proper job of things. First of all—and pressed for time when you turned up—he decided to clear his escaped prisoner record. He took a chance with a drunk customer, drugged him and tattooed him—but overlooked the signature—and then faked his car death. Then he came down here to deal with Porthos.

"With Porthos out of the way he knew he'd have no trouble with Madame Vaillard. She was already an accomplice to two murders. When I checked the salon and found he had left, I came down at once and got the Remoulins police. We arrived just in time to see Madame Vaillard's torch flicking away in the distance."

"Madame Raventhal's assistant. So he was the real Athos!"

"Yes. Though I don't think she knew it." He patted me on the shoulder. "Drink up, Belain. Drink, should I say, to what was nearly the last drop?"

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THINK TWICE

Second thoughts may be first-rate mental material but even if doublethink doesn't solve our problems for you, no need for a second's dismay—answers on page 159

1. *If two monkeys sit in the corner of a room and look at another pair in another corner, and so forth, until every pair in a corner looks at another pair, how many monkeys can then say they are looking at other monkeys?*
2. *When a certain young woman heard that* 1901 *threepenny pieces were worth almost twenty-four pounds, she took what she had, hastened to the nearest bank, and found the story true. Yet she was disappointed. Why?*
3. *Can you give three consecutive days of the week without naming Sunday, Tuesday, or Friday?*
4. *A woman declares that her grandfather is only five years older than her father. Can this be true?*
5. *If there are two sheep, one facing east and the other one facing west, how many miles must they walk before they come face to face, assuming they walk straight on?*
6. *"The number of words in the sentence you are reading now is thirteen!" Now then, can you think of a sentence that says exactly the opposite but is true, nevertheless?*

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BEGGAR ON THE DUBLIN BRIDGE

I heard hobnailed shoes flinting the cobbles in sparks

BY RAY BRADBURY

"A FOOL," I said. "That's what I am."

"Why?" asked my wife. "What for?"

I brooded by our third-floor hotel window. On the Dublin street below a man passed, his face to the lamplight. "Him," I muttered. "Two days ago . . ."

Two days ago as I was walking along, someone had "hissed" me from the hotel alley. "Sir, it's important! Sir!"

I turned into the shadow. This little man in the direst tones said, "I've a job in Belfast if I'd a pound for the train fare!"

I hesitated.

"A most important job!" he went on swiftly. "Pays well! I'll—I'll post you back the loan! Just give me your name and hotel—"

He knew me for a tourist. But it was too late; his promise to pay had moved me. The pound note crackled in my hand, being worked free from several others.

The man's eye skimmed like a shadowing hawk. "If I had two pounds, I could eat on the way—"

I uncrumpled two notes.

"And three pounds would bring the wife—"

I unleafed a third.

"Ah, hell!" cried the man. "Five, just five poor pounds, would find us a hotel in that brutal city and let me get to the job, for sure!"

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What a dancing fighter he was, light on his toes, weaving, tapping with his hands, flicking with his eyes, smiling with his mouth, jabbing with his tongue.

"Lord thank you, bless you, sir!"

He ran, my five pounds with him. I was half in the hotel before I realised that, for all his vows, he had not recorded my name.

"Gah!" I cried then.

"Gah!" I cried now at the window. For there, passing below, was the very fellow who should have been in Belfast two nights ago.

"Oh, I know him," said my wife. "He stopped me this noon. Wanted train fare to Galway."

"Did you give it to him?"

"No," said my wife simply.

Then the worst thing happened. The demon glanced up, saw us, and darned if he didn't wave!

I had to stop myself from waving back. A sickly grin played on my lips. "It's got so I hate to leave the hotel," I said.

"It's cold out, all right."

"No," I said. "Not the cold. *Them.*"

And we looked again from the window. There was the cobbled Dublin street with the night wind blowing in a fine soot along one way to Trinity College, another to St. Stephen's Green. Across by the sweetshop two men stood mummified in the shadows. Farther up in a doorway was a bundle of old newspapers that would stir like a pack of mice and wish you the time of evening if you walked by. Below, by the hotel entrance, stood a feverish hothouse rose of a woman with a bundle.

"Oh, the beggars," said my wife.

"No, not just 'oh, the beggars,'" I said. "But, oh, the people in the streets, who somehow *became* beggars."

My wife peered at me. "You're not afraid of them?"

"Yes, no. Hell. It's that woman with the bundle who's worst. She's a force of nature, she is. Assaults you with her poverty. As for the others—well, it's a big chess game for me now. We've been in Dublin—what?—eight weeks? Eight weeks I've sat up here with my typewriter, studying their off hours and on. When they take a coffee break, I take one, run for the sweetshop, the bookshop, the Olympia Theatre. If I time it right, there's no handout, no my wanting to trot them into the barber's or the kitchen."

"Lord," said my wife, "you sound driven."

"I am. But most of all by that beggar on O'Connell Bridge!"

"Which one?"

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"Which one, indeed! He's a wonder, a terror. I hate him, I love him. To see is to disbelieve him. Come on."

On the way down in the lift my wife said, "If you held your face right, the beggars wouldn't bother you."

"My face," I explained patiently, "is my face. It's from Apple Dumpling, Wisconsin, Sarsaparilla, Maine. *Kind to Dogs* is writ on my brow for all to read. Let the street be empty—then let me step out and there's a strikers' march of freeloaders leaping out of manholes for miles around."

"If," my wife went on, "you could just learn to look over, round, or through those people, stare them down." She mused. "Shall I show you how to handle them?"

"All right, show me! We're here!"

We advanced through the Royal Hibernian Hotel lobby to squint out at the sooty night. "Good lord, come and get me," I murmured. "There they are, their heads up, their eyes on fire."

"Meet me down by the bookshop in two minutes," said my wife. "Watch."

"Wait!" I cried.

But she was out of the door and down the steps. I watched, nose pressed to the glass pane. The beggars leaned towards my wife. Their eyes glowed.

My wife looked calmly at them all for a long moment. The beggars hesitated, creaking, I was sure, in their shoes. Then their mouths collapsed. Their eyes snuffed out. Their heads sank down.

With a tat-tat like a small drum, my wife's shoes went briskly away, fading.

From below in the buttery I heard music and laughter. I'll run down, I thought, and slug me a quick one. Then, bravery resurgent—No, I thought, and swung the door wide. The effect was much as if someone had struck a great Mongolian steel gong, once.

I thought I heard a tremendous insuck of breath. Then I heard hobnailed shoes flinting the cobbles in sparks. The men came running. I saw hands waving; mouths opened on smiles like old pianos.

Far down the street at the bookshop my wife waited, her back turned. But that third eye in the back of her head must have caught the scene: Columbus greeted by Indians; St. Francis amidst his squirrel friends with a handful of crumbs.

I was not half down the steps when the woman charged up, thrusting the unwrapped bundle at me.

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"Ah, see the poor child!" she wailed.

I stared at the baby. The baby stared back. Saints in heaven, did or did not the shrewd thing wink at me?

I've gone mad, I thought; the babe's eyes are shut. She's filled it with beer to keep it warm and on display.

My hand, my coins, blurred among them.

"Praise be!"

"The child thanks you, sir!"

"Ah, sure. There's only a few of us left!"

I broke through them and beyond, running. My wife, without turning, saw my reflection in the bookshop window and nodded.

I stood getting my breath, brooding at my own image: the summer eyes, the ebullient and defenceless mouth. "All right, say it," I sighed. "It's the way I hold my face."

"I love the way you hold your face." She took my arm. "I wish I could do it too."

I looked back as one of the beggars strolled off in the blowing dark with my shillings.

"'There's only a few of us left,'" I said aloud. "What did he mean, saying that?"

"'There's only a few of us left.'" My wife stared into the shadows. "Is that what he said?"

"It's something to think about. A few of *what*? Left *where*?" The street was empty now. It was starting to rain. "Well," I said at last. "Let me show you the even bigger mystery, the man who provokes me to strange wild rages, then calms me to delight. Solve him and you solve all the beggars that ever were."

"On O'Connell Bridge?" asked my wife.

"On O'Connell Bridge," I said.

And we walked on down in the gently misting rain.

Halfway to the bridge, as we were examining some fine Irish crystal in a window, a woman with a shawl over her head plucked my elbow.

"Destroyed!" The woman sobbed. "My poor sister. Cancer, the doctor said; her dead in a month! And me with mouths to feed! Ah, if you had just a penny!"

I felt my wife's arm tighten to mine.

I looked at the woman, split as always, one half saying, A penny is all she asks! The other half doubting: Clever woman, she knows that by underasking you'll overpay! I hated myself for the battle of halves.

I gasped. "You're—"

"I'm what, sir?"

Why, I thought, you're the woman who was just by the hotel with the baby!

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"I'm sick!" She drew back in shadow. "Sick with crying for the half-dead!"

You've stashed the baby somewhere, I thought, and put on a green instead of a grey shawl and run the long way round to head us off here—

My wife cut across my thoughts. "Beg pardon, but aren't you the same woman we just met at our hotel?"

The woman and I were both shocked at this rank insubordination. It wasn't done!

The woman's face crumpled. I peered close. And yes, it was a different face. I could not but admire her. She knew, sensed, had learnt what actors know, sense, learn—that by thrusting, yelling, all fiery-lipped arrogance one moment you are one character; and by sinking, giving way, crumpling the mouth and eyes in pitiful collapse, you are another. My same woman, yes; but the same face and role? Quite obviously no.

She gave me a last blow beneath the belt. "Cancer."

I flinched. It was a brief tussle then, a kind of disengagement from one woman and an engagement with the other. My wife lost my arm, and the woman found my cash. As if she were on roller skates, she whisked round the corner, sobbing.

"Lord—" In awe I watched her go. "She's studied Stanislavsky. In one book he says that squinting one eye and twitching one lip to the side will disguise you. I wonder if she's nerve enough to be at the hotel later."

"I wonder," said my wife, "when my husband will stop admiring and start criticising such acting as that?"

"But what if it were true? Everything she said? And she's lived with it so long, she can't cry any more, and so has to play-act in order to survive? What if?"

"It can't be true," said my wife slowly. "I just won't believe it. Now, here's where we turn for O'Connell Bridge, isn't it?"

"It is." That corner was probably empty in the falling rain for a long time after we were gone.

There stood the grey stone bridge bearing the great O'Connell's name, and there the River Liffey rolling cold grey waters under, and even from a block off I heard faint singing. My mind spun back to December.

"Christmas," I murmured, "is the best time of all in Dublin." For beggars, I meant, but left it unsaid.

For in the week before Christmas the Dublin streets teem with raven flocks of children, herded by schoolmasters or nuns. They cluster in doorways, peer from theatre foyers, jostle in alleys; *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen* on their lips; *It Came Upon a*

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Midnight Clear in their eyes; tambourines in hand, snowflakes shaping a collar of grace about their tender necks. It is singing everywhere and anywhere in Dublin on such nights, and there was no night my wife and I did not walk down along Grafton Street to hear *Away in a Manger* being sung to the queue outside the cinema or *Deck the Halls* in front of the Four Provinces pub.

In all, we counted in Christ's season one night half a hundred bands of convent girls or city schoolboys lacing the cold air and weaving great treadles of song up, down, over and across from end to end of the town. Like walking in snowfall, you could not walk among them and not be touched. "The sweet beggars," I called them, who gave in turn for what you gave as you went your way.

Given such example, even the most dilapidated beggars of Dublin washed their hands, mended their torn smiles, borrowed banjos. They even gathered for four-part harmonies. How could they stay silent when half the world was singing and the other half paying dearly, gladly, for just another chorus?

So Christmas was best for all. The beggars *worked*, off key, it's true; but there they were, one time in the year, busy.

But Christmas was over, and the beggars of the town, shut and glad for the silence, returned to their workless ways. All save the beggars on O'Connell Bridge who, all through the year, most of them, tried to give as good as they got.

"They have their self-respect," I said, walking with my wife. "I'm glad this first man here strums a guitar, the next one a fiddle. And there now—in the very centre of the bridge!"

"The man we're looking for?"

"That's him. Squeezing the concertina. It's all right to look. Or I think it is."

"What do you mean, you think it is? He's blind, isn't he?"

These raw words shocked me, as if my wife had said something indecent. "That's the trouble," I said at last. "I don't know."

And we both in passing looked at the man standing there in the very middle of O'Connell Bridge.

He was a man of no great height, a bandy statue swiped from some country garden perhaps, and his clothes like the clothes of most in Ireland too often laundered by the weather, and his hair too often greyed by the smoking air, and his cheeks sooted with beard, and a nest or two of witless hair in each cupped ear, and the blushing cheeks of a man who has stood too long in the cold and drunk too much in the pub so as to stand too long in the cold again. Dark glasses covered his eyes and there was no telling what lay behind.

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I had begun to wonder, weeks back, if his sight prowled me along, damning my guilty speed, or if only his ears caught the passing of a harried conscience. There was that awful itch to seize, in passing, the glasses from his nose. But I feared the abyss I might find, into which my senses in one terrible roar might tumble. Best not to know if civet's orb or interstellar space gaped behind the smoked panes.

But even more, there was a special reason why I could not let the man be.

In the rain and wind and snow for two solid months I had seen him standing here with no cap or hat on his head. He was the only man in all of Dublin I saw in the downpours and drizzles who stood by the hour alone with the drench mizzling his ears, threading his ash-red hair, plastering it over his skull, rivuleting his eyebrows, and purling over his glasses. Down through the cracks of his cheeks, the lines about his mouth, and off his chin the weather ran. His sharp chin shot the drizzle in a steady dripping off in the air, down his tweed scarf and locomotive-coloured coat.

"Why doesn't he wear a hat?" I said suddenly.

"Why," said my wife, "maybe he hasn't got one."

"He must have one," I said.

"Keep your voice down."

"He's got to have one," I said, more quietly.

"Maybe he can't afford one. Maybe he has bills to pay, someone sick."

"But to stand out for weeks, months, in the rain and not so much as flinch, ignoring the rain—it's beyond understanding."

I shook my head. "I can only think it's a trick. That must be it. Like the others, this is his way of getting sympathy, of making you cold and miserable as himself, so you'll give him more."

"I bet you're sorry you said that already," said my wife.

"I am. I am." For even under my cap the rain was running off my nose. "Sweet saints in heaven, what's the answer?"

"Why don't you ask him?"

"No." I was even more afraid of that.

Then the last thing happened, the thing that went with his standing bareheaded in the cold rain. For a moment, while we had been talking at some distance, he had been silent. Now, he gave his concertina a great mash. From the folding, unfolding snakelike box he squeezed a series of asthmatic notes, which were no preparation for what followed.

He opened his mouth. He sang. The sweet, clear baritone voice which rang over O'Connell Bridge, steady and sure, was

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beautifully shaped and controlled, not a quaver, not a flaw anywhere in it. The man just opened his mouth. He did not sing so much as let his soul free.

"Oh," said my wife, "how lovely."

"Lovely." I nodded.

We listened while he sang the full irony of *Dublin's Fair City*—where it rains twelve inches a month the winter through—followed by the white-wine clarity of *Kathleen Mavourneen*, *Macushla*, and all the other tired lads, lasses, lakes, hills, past glories, present miseries—but all somehow revived and moving about, young and freshly painted in the light spring and suddenly not winter rain.

"Why," said my wife, "he could be on the stage."

"Maybe he was once."

"Oh, he's too good to be standing here."

"I've thought that—often."

My wife fumbled with her purse. I looked from her to the singing man, the rain falling on his bare head, streaming through his shellacked hair, trembling on his ear lobes. My wife had her purse open.

And then the strange perversity. Before my wife could move towards him, I took her elbow and led her down the other side of the bridge. She pulled back for a moment, giving me a look, then came along.

As we went away along the bank of the Liffey he started a new song, one we had heard often in Ireland. Glancing back I saw him, head proud, black glasses taking the pour, mouth open, and the fine voice clear:

I'll be glad when you're dead
in your grave, old man.
Be glad when you're dead
in your grave, old man.
Be glad when you're dead,
Flowers over your head,
And then I'll marry the journeyman.

It is only later, looking back, that you see that while you were doing all the other things in your life, working on an article concerning one part of Ireland in your rain-battered hotel, taking your wife to dinner, wandering in the museums, you also had an eye beyond to the street and those who served themselves, who only stood to wait.

The beggars of Dublin—who bothers to wonder on them, look, see, know, understand? Yet the outer shell of the eye sees and the inner shell of the mind records, and yourself, caught between,

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ignores the rare service these two halves of a bright sense are up to.

So I did and did not concern myself with beggars. So I did run from them or walk to meet them, by turn. So I heard but did not hear, considered but did not consider: "There's only a few of us left!"

One day I was sure the man taking his daily shower on O'Connell Bridge while he sang was *not* blind. And the next, his head to me was a cup of darkness.

One afternoon I found myself lingering before a tweed shop near O'Connell Bridge, staring in at a stack of good thick burly caps. I did not need another cap, yet in I went to pay out money for a fine warm brown-coloured cap which I turned round and round in my hands, in a strange trance.

"Sir," said the assistant, "That cap is a seven. I would guess your head, sir, at seven and a half."

"This will fit me. This will fit me." I stuffed the cap in my pocket.

"Let me get you a bag, sir—"

"No!" Hot-cheeked, suddenly suspicious of what I was up to, I fled.

There was the bridge in the soft rain. All I need do now was walk over—

In the middle of the bridge, my singing man was not there. In his place stood an old man and woman cranking a great piano-box hurdy-gurdy which ratcheted and coughed, giving forth no melody but a grand melancholy sort of iron indigestion.

I waited for the tune, if tune it was, to finish. I kneaded the new tweed cap in my sweaty fist while the hurdy-gurdy prickled, spanged, and thumped.

"Be damned to ya!" the old man and old woman, furious with their job, seemed to say, their eyes red hot in the rain. "Pay us! Listen! But we'll give you no tune! Make up your own!" their mute lips said.

And standing there on the spot where the beggar always sang without his cap, I thought, Why don't they take one fiftieth of the money they make each month and have the thing tuned! If I were cranking the box, I'd want a tune, at least for myself!

If you were cranking the box, I answered. But you're not. And it's obvious they hate the begging job—who'd blame them? —and want no part of giving back a familiar song as recompense.

How different from my capless friend. My *friend*?

I blinked with surprise, then stepped forward. "Beg pardon. The man who played the concertina—"

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The woman stopped cranking and glared at me.

"The man with no cap in the rain—"

"Ah, him!" snapped the woman.

"He's not here today?"

"Do you see him?" cried the woman.

She started cranking the infernal device. I put a penny in the tin cup. She peered at me as if I'd spit in the cup. I put in another penny. She stopped.

"Do you know where he is?"

"Sick in bed. The damn cold! We heard him go off, coughing."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"No!"

"Do you know his name?"

"Now who would know that?"

I stood there, feeling directionless, thinking of the man somewhere off in the town, alone. I looked at the new cap foolishly.

The two old people were watching me uneasily. I put a last shilling in the cup. "He'll be all right," I said, not to them, but to someone—hopefully, myself.

The woman heaved the crank. The bucketing machine let loose a fall of glass and junk in its hideous interior.

"The tune," I said numbly. "What is it?"

"You're deaf!" snapped the woman. "It's the national anthem! Do you mind removing your cap?"

I showed her the new cap in my hand.

She glared up. "Your cap, man, *your* cap!"

"Oh!" Flushing, I seized the old cap from my head.

Now I had a cap in each hand. The woman cranked. The "music" played. The rain hit my brow, my eyelids, my mouth. On the far side of the bridge I stopped for the hard, the slow decision: which cap to try on my drenched skull?

During the next week I passed the bridge often, but there was always just the old couple there with their pandemonium device, or no one there at all.

On the last day of our visit my wife started to pack the new tweed cap away in the suitcase.

"Thanks, no." I took it from her. "Let's keep it out—on the mantel, please. There."

That night the hotel manager brought a farewell bottle to our room. The talk was long and good, the hour grew late, there was a fire on the hearth, big and lively, and brandy in the glasses, and silence for a moment in the room perhaps because quite suddenly we found silence falling in great soft flakes past our windows.

The manager, glass in hand, watched the continual lace, then

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looked down at the midnight street, and at last said under his breath, " ' There's only a few of us left.' "

I glanced at my wife, and she at me.

The manager caught us. " Do you know him then? Has he said it to you? "

" Yes. But what does the phrase mean? "

The manager watched all those figures down there standing in the shadows and sipped his drink. " Once I thought he meant he fought in the Troubles, and there's just a few of the I.R.A. left. But no.

" Or maybe he means that in a richer world the begging population is melting away. But no to that also. So maybe, perhaps, he means there aren't many ' human beings ' left who look, see what they look at, and understand well enough for one to ask and one to give. Everyone busy, running here, jumping there, there's no time to study one another."

He half turned from the window. " So you know There's Only a Few of Us Left, do you? "

My wife and I nodded.

" Then do you know the woman with the baby? "

" Yes," I said.

" And the one with the cancer? "

" Yes," said my wife.

" And the man who needs train fare to Cork? "

" Belfast," said I.

" Galway," said my wife.

The manager smiled sadly and turned back to the window. " What about the old couple with the piano that plays no tune? "

" Has it ever? " I asked.

" Not since I was a boy." The manager's face was shadowed now. " Do you know the beggar on O'Connell Bridge? "

" Which one? " I said.

But I knew which one, for I was looking at the cap there on the mantel.

" Did you see the paper today? " asked the manager.

" No."

" There's just the item, bottom half of page five, *Irish Times*. It seems he just got tired. And he threw his concertina over into the River Liffey. And he jumped after it."

He was back then yesterday! I thought. And I didn't pass by!

" The poor beggar." The manager laughed with a hollow exhalation. " What a funny, horrid way to die. That silly concertina—I hate them, don't you? Wheezing on its way down, like a sick cat, and the man falling after. I laugh and I'm ashamed of laughing. Well. They didn't find the body."

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"Oh, lord!" I cried, getting up. "Oh, damn!"

The manager watched me carefully now, surprised at my concern. "You couldn't help it."

"I could! I never gave him a penny, not one, ever! Did you?"

"Come to think of it, no."

"But you're worse than I am!" I protested. "I've seen you around town, shovelling out pennies hand over fist. Why, why not to him?"

"I suppose I thought he was overdoing it."

"Yes!" I was at the window now too, staring down through the falling snow. "I thought his bare head was a trick to make me feel sorry. After a while you think everything's a trick! I used to pass there on winter nights with the rain thick and him there singing, and he made me feel so cold I hated his guts. I wonder how many other people felt cold and hated him because he did that to them? So, instead of getting money, he got nothing in his cup.

"I lumped him with the rest. But maybe he was one of the legitimate ones, the new poor just starting out this winter—not a beggar ever before; so you hock your clothes to feed a stomach and wind up a man in the rain without a hat."

The snow was falling fast now, erasing the lamps and the statues in the shadows of the lamps below.

"How do you tell the difference between them?" I asked. "How can you judge which is honest, which isn't?"

"The fact is," said the manager quietly, "you can't. There's no difference between them. Some have been at it longer than others and have gone shrewd, forgotten how it all started a long time ago. On a Saturday they had food. On a Sunday they didn't. On a Monday they asked for credit. On a Tuesday they borrowed their first match. Thursday a cigarette. And a few Fridays later they found themselves, goodness knows how, in front of a place called the Royal Hibernian Hotel. They couldn't tell you what happened or why.

"One thing's sure, though: they're hanging to the cliff by their fingernails. Poor fellow, someone must've stomped on that man's hands on O'Connell Bridge and he just gave up the ghost and went over.

"So what does it prove? You cannot stare them down or look away from them. You cannot run and hide from them. You can only give to them all. If you start drawing lines, someone gets hurt. I'm sorry now I didn't give that blind singer a shilling each time I passed. Well, well. Let us console ourselves and hope it wasn't money but something at home or in his past that

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did him in. There's no way to find out. The paper lists no name."

Snow fell silently across our sight. Below, the dark shapes waited. It was hard to tell whether snow was making sheep of the wolves or sheep of the sheep, gently mantling their shoulders, their hats and shawls.

A moment later, going down in the lift, I found the new tweed cap in my hand. Coatless, in my shirtsleeves, I stepped out into the night. I gave the cap to the first man who came. What money I had in my pockets was soon gone.

Then left alone, shivering, I happened to glance up. I stood, I froze, blinking up through the drift, the drift, the silent drift of blinding snow. I saw the high hotel windows, the lights, the shadows.

What's it like up there? I thought. Are fires lit? Is it warm as breath? Who are all those people? Are they drinking? Are they happy? Do they even know I'm here?

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BEGGAR-MAN

Dark eagles from their scowling nest,
Curses swoop to my behest;
And I curse most bitterly
Each fat pursey man I see.
You pass and leave my tale unheard,
But wait, sirs, wait ! for I've a word
Will agonize ye, squeeze ye, twist,
Till the fibres of the wrist
Burst like ragged bottle-straw,
Till rolling eye and rigid jaw
Are witness to the agony
That shakes yeer rich anatomy.

Now, if you neglect me more,
By Baal and Belzebub I've swore
To every beggar-man I'll teach it,
And from our tearing throats we'll screech it
Into every rich man's ear,
And howl him to a hell of fear,
A hell of fear, a hell of fear,
With scorching curses ! So shall I
Get one good laugh before I die.

L. A. G. STRONG,
Run, Boys, Run, the Beggar-Man's Mad

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SPRING GREEN

Lady, lady, my spring-green lady,
May I come into your orchard, lady?
For the leaf is now on the apple-bough,
And the sun is high and the lawn is shady . . .

The Spring-Green Lady

Green, how I love you, green.
Green wind. Green branches.
The ship upon the sea
and the horse in the mountain.
With the shadow on her waist
she dreams on her balustrade,
green flesh, hair of green,
with eyes of cold silver.
Green, how I love you, green.
Under the gipsy moon
all things are looking at her
and she cannot look at them.

F. GARCIA LORCA, *Romance Sonambulo*

Green Laughter

He knew now that it was not merely man-like, but a man—a green man on an orange field, green like the beautifully coloured green beetle in an English garden, running downhill towards him with easy strides . . . The running, the waving, the shouts, had not been intended for him. And the green man was not a man at all, but a woman . . . He had been expecting wonders, had been prepared for wonders, but not prepared for a goddess carved apparently out of green stone, yet alive . . .

The Green Lady had done something for which he was quite unprepared. She raised her arm and pointed at him: not as in menace, but as though inviting the other creatures to behold him. At the same moment her face changed again, and for a

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second he thought she was going to cry. Instead she burst into laughter—peal upon peal of laughter till her whole body shook with it, till she bent almost double, with her hands resting on her knees, still laughing and repeatedly pointing at him. The animals, like our own dogs in similar circumstances, dimly understood that there was merriment afoot ; all manner of gambolling, wing-clapping, snorting, and standing upon hind legs began to be displayed. And still the Green Lady laughed . . .

C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra*

Eye's Green Colour

Fiametta walks under the quincebuds
In a gown the colour of flowers;
Her small breasts shine through the silken stuff
Like raindrops after showers.
The green hem of her dress is silk, but duller
Than her eye's green colour.

Her shadow restores the grass's green—
Where the sun had gilded it;
The air has given her copper hair
The sanguine that was requisite.
Whatever her flaws, my lady
Has no fault in her young body.

She leans with her long slender arms
To pull down morning upon her—
Fragrance of quince, white light and falling cloud
The day shall have lacked due honour
Until I shall have rightly praised
Her standing thus with slight arms upraised.

John Peale Bishop, *Fiametta*

Pink as Grass

" Mr. Niland— " and then she paused.

" Don't be so bourgeois," he said, grinning. " Just call me Alex."

But this she was not capable of doing. " Am I green? " she blurted.

" Green as grass," he said cheerfully, patting her on the back and opening the front door. " Only I have seen grass look pink, *and* purple."

Stella Gibbons, *Westwood*

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Oliver's Salad Days?

"He is so jolly green," said Charley.

CHARLES DICKENS, *Oliver Twist*

Evergreen

Green, green, and green again, and greener still
spring towards summer bends the immortal bow,
and northward breaks the wave of daffodil,
and northward breaks the wave of summer's snow
Green, green, and green again, and greener yet,
wide as this forest is, which counts its leaves,
wide as this kingdom, in a green sea set,
which round its shores perpetual blossom weaves—
Green, green, and green again, and green once more
the season finds its term—then greenest, even,
when frost at twilight on the leaf lies hoar,
and one cold star shines bright in greenest heaven.
But love, like music, keeps no seasons ever;
Like music too, once known is known forever.

CONRAD AIKEN, *And In the Human Heart*

Red and Green

She laughed, wreathing his knees with the lengths of supple green stalk.

"Aren't they like the hair of the nymphs in Prothalamion?" she said. "'With goodly greenish locks all loose untied'—wouldn't it be wonderful to have hair that colour?"

"Don't be silly," said her husband proudly; out of the corner of his eye he could see a strand of deeply burnished red.

ELIZABETH JENKINS, *Portrait of an Actor*

Tree-Lover

Nor white nor red was ever seen
So amorous as this lovely green.
Fond lovers, cruel as their flame
Cut in these trees their mistress' name:
Little, alas! they know or heed
How far these beauties hers exceed!
Fair trees! wheres'e'er your barks I wound
No name shall but your own be found.

ANDREW MARVELL, *Thoughts in a Garden*

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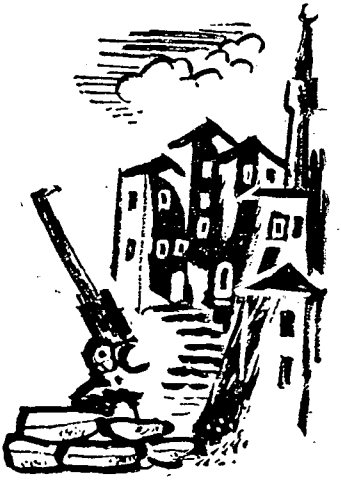
THE DAY I WASN'T QUITE EXECUTED



BY DAVID E. WALKER

I GOT back to the Hotel Bristol, near Belgrade's main railway station, about one in the morning. With Peter Brown of Reuters and Russell Hill of the *New York Herald Tribune*, I had been out dining and wining. It was 1 a.m., Palm Sunday, April 6, 1941.

At the hotel reception desk the night porter, a man too old to have been mobilised, handed me a note with my key. The message was scribbled on a torn piece of paper and said simply: *Ich warte auf Dich.* (I am waiting for you.) It was unsigned but that didn't matter.

I hadn't known Bluebell, the hotel barmaid, very long. In fact I hadn't been very long in Yugoslavia. In 1939 I had been chased out of Switzerland when the Swiss learnt what I was up to; in 1940 I had been hunted out of Rumania when it came under German occupation; and, after watching the first German units enter Bulgaria on March 1, 1941, I had again been forced to pack in a hurry—this time for Belgrade. I had made the journey with a drunken member of the Gestapo.

The scribbled note was from Bluebell and I felt both flattered and puzzled. Bluebell's real name—she was a Montenegrin—was very much too complicated for any of us to master.

We called her Bluebell because she was in many ways the opposite. Even her greatest admirers, and I was one of them, could not call her slim. She never drooped, and she had the

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healthy, ruddy complexion of a country girl. At the same time she was highly intelligent, spoke good German and a little French, and could more than hold her own with her polyglot customers. She had a generous and inviting bosom—known cynically to some as the Popular Front—and this aspect of her charm was accentuated by the gay peasant blouses she affected when at work behind the bar. Her thick auburn hair surged up in an extraordinary roll over her forehead, which late at night looked like a giant wave of wine always just about to break, while the rest of it tumbled and cascaded down her shoulders.

I found her entrancing, but had no right to do so. Legitimately enough, I was working at the time for the *Daily Mirror* in the Balkans. Under the counter I had been working since before the outbreak of war for the Government. And although a spy must be careful with almost everyone he meets, he must always be on particular guard where barmen and barmaids are concerned. In times of tension abroad the barman is almost certainly in somebody's pay. His is an obvious listening-post and he has what is known in spy-jargon as "excellent cover." An experienced barman or barmaid in a well-placed foreign hotel can expect discreet approaches from more country than one.

I crumpled the note up.

"News?" Peter asked.

"I don't think so," I said.

I looked in at the bar, but it was empty. Bluebell must mean she was waiting for me at her one-roomed flat along the road, almost opposite the railway station. I was damnably tired, as we all were. For ten days now, since the coup d'état against the pro-German Government, we had been working flat out, phoning our dispatches to neutral Switzerland for relay to London, and at night we were carried on the wave of patriotic Yugoslav elation at the prospect of war. The most popular song in the night clubs was *Tipperary*, sung in six dialects, and Yugoslav officers wore the Union Jack in the lapels of their uniforms.

From my window at the Bristol I had watched the conscripts being marched to the station: men and boys in white goat-hair skull caps shuffling along in their sandals. In due course they would be issued with German Mauser rifles captured in the war of 1914-1918. The artillery had set off for the frontier, drawn by horses. Every now and then a Yugoslav bi-plane would lurch unsteadily over the capital. We found Yugoslavs who literally did not know what a tank was: it was like trying to explain the telephone to someone who has never seen such a thing and who thinks you are pulling his leg. Nothing you could say diminished their confidence.

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Anyway, Belgrade would be all right. It was defenceless and had been declared an open city in the event of hostilities. No blackout had been organised and no air raid shelters had been built. Under the rules of war, as an open city, Belgrade would be spared. We had all applied for passes to the front from the Ministry of Defence. How to keep in touch with the secret radio transmitter to London while remaining a *Daily Mirror* correspondent was my own headache: you couldn't do much forward planning. Each day had to look after itself.

"It's sleep for me," Russell Hill said. Peter and I agreed. It seemed slightly unfair to Bluebell if she'd meant what she said, and she sometimes had items of information, but I could see her tomorrow.

The lift was out of order but that was nothing unusual.

About four hours later, at 5.30 that same Palm Sunday morning, I was woken by the phone at my bedside. It was John Segrue of the *News Chronicle*, whom we all respected and loved.

"I've just been listening to Berlin Radio," he explained. "The Reichswehr has received instructions to restore order in Yugoslavia."

"Does that mean war this morning?"

"It usually does." His voice sounded weary but calm. John was a good deal older than the rest of us.

I was having a bath about an hour later when I heard the drone of aircraft. As I reached the hall of the hotel, a landmine hit a nine-storey building down the road, cut it in half, and blew all our windows in. The station was a legitimate early objective.

I was surprised to find Bluebell already in the lobby. I asked her to give me a drink and have one herself.

"Why didn't you come?" she asked. "I had something to tell you."

"About all this?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Why should I bother?"

We each had a slivovitch, then another. The bombing had become heavier.

"Where are you going now?" she demanded. "You can't stay here. Belgrade will be destroyed."

Why did she still want to know my movements? A new chapter had begun. Was it just my charm and my money that kept her devotion at this pitch?

People began crowding into the bar and I went upstairs for some breakfast, but part of the ceiling fell into it. I tried to make some routine calls but there was no one at the switchboard.

I packed a few things into a suitcase and gathered up my

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faithful little typewriter. Downstairs I paid the bill to a startled concierge, as a wild British gesture.

Bluebell was standing beside me.

"I'm going to leave these things here for the present," I told her. "I'm going out to have a look round. Your best bet is to stay where you are."

I had three immediate objectives, none of which could at any time have been dealt with by telephone. I had to find out what plans were being made by the two men in charge of the transmitter, and had they had any orders from London? Was the Yugoslav Ministry of Information still in contact with the outside world? What was happening at the British Legation, and had they any intention of moving?

It was a wonderful spring morning, with a clear blue sky. The first two waves of bombers had come in, flying in perfect formation at about ten thousand feet. By now they weren't bothering about risks—indeed, there were none—and were engaged in swatting the human flies beneath them with savage efficiency.

When the bombing began, the people had run out of their houses to shake their fists at the aircraft. What else could they do? Water, light, and communications had broken down within an hour of the first raid, and fire-engines were grouped helplessly round burning buildings.

I climbed the hill to the Terazije, Belgrade's Piccadilly, which had no military significance whatever, and the dead and the dying stretched for a straight half-mile. A great number of these people had been killed by blast, a thing they knew nothing about. At one corner a group of nuns, with the calm that comes only from inner serenity, were loading the worst cases into a baker's van. Jewellers' shops spilt out into the street and broken-up wax figures from the couturiers' looked macabre in their own right. Belgrade's two dozen anti-aircraft guns had long since been silenced. This was Palm Sunday murder, by daylight.

The two men who worked the transmitter had left home. That was that, for the moment. The building in which the Press Office was housed was half destroyed and in flames. That was that.

The War and Defence Ministries were burning, which meant the end of immediate contact with the outside world, and at the British Legation a convoy of trucks was being urgently loaded. The Service Attachés had blossomed out into uniform.

"The Government is leaving and we've got to go with 'em," I was told. Peter Brown had secured a seat in one of the trucks. Russell Hill I'd lost sight of. As I walked downhill back to the Bristol, the clear blue sky was disappearing behind smoke. I bumped into an old friend and enemy, Rod Munro, an American

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correspondent whom I'd worked with and against in Rumania and Bulgaria.

"I've *got* to find Sonia," he said. "I promised to get her out of this shambles when it happened, but I can't find the street she lives in." He was being more gallant than I was.

"Have you got any news out?" I asked.

"Not a word."

Nobody had.

Back at the Hotel Bristol I met Chockor, a Polish dramatist who had escaped from Warsaw on foot in 1939. He was over sixty and now the Germans were catching up with him again. He implored me to wangle him a ride in one of the British Legation trucks. There was no sign of John Segrue.

Bluebell repeated her question. "Where are you going?"

"I don't know," I said. "I'm just going."

We had a farewell drink from one of the few unbroken bottles in the bar. By this time Bluebell's domain was a shambles. Outside, the bombing had become a recurrent theme, periods of silence alternating with new attacks.

Chockor and I set off together. The sun was now blazing and he was wearing an immense overcoat. By the station the goods yards were burning but the main buildings were intact. We even found a couple of porters and we asked if they'd help us carry our gear up the hill. They refused.

"We are British," said Chockor.

Without a word the porters picked up our gear and, when we reached the Legation, refused any tip. "May victory be ours," they remarked rather doubtfully, and disappeared.

Half of the Legation convoy had already gone. When he saw the hundreds of screaming men and women seeking British protection from the last remaining trucks, Chockor simply turned to me and made the sign of the cross on my forehead. It may seem irrelevant but it sticks in my memory. I have never seen him since. He was among those left behind, and it's no good just saying it doesn't matter.

I started to look around for members of my own organisation but there were none that I knew, so there was no one I could ask about the transmitter.

But at least I was given the tip-off. The Yugoslav Government, with the British Legation hard on its heels, was making for a spa called Vrnjacka Banja. The Government was quitting to save the capital further punishment. They honestly believed that Hitler and Goering would care.

There was no room for me on the Legation convoy and I wondered where Segrue could be. Then Patrick Maitland

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turned up. Patrick Maitland—who after the war became for some time an MP—was *The Times* correspondent and he had acquired an old Chrysler without number-plates. This would do. Without him I don't think I would have got out of Belgrade.

But first of all, he said, he must save his sister-in-law and his mother-in-law. I stood on the step of the car because the fumes and the rubble, with the dead on the road, made it difficult for him to drive without guidance. Stukas were now coming in at three hundred feet.

We got out that evening; and from Mount Avala, where one and a half million trees commemorated the Serbs who had died in the first war, we saw the sun setting slowly over the bonfire. Since not a single Allied correspondent was able to report the Belgrade blitz when it happened, it is worth recalling that we saw only the start of it. Except for a break on the Tuesday, it went on for four days. In an open and defenceless city between twelve thousand and twenty thousand civilians were killed.

That night the old Chrysler broke down. Patrick and I curled up in a waterless river-bed, sleeping like logs.

Next morning we drove on in some state, hauled by oxen, and eventually reached Vrnjacka Banja. Here we found the Yugoslav Government, the British Legation, the Allied correspondents, and even the man in charge of the secret transmitter. Maitland, I hasten to add, was an honest correspondent, not a Government servant like myself.

But I found that London had issued instructions which put the transmitter at the disposal of the Yugoslav Commander-in-Chief, who was already out of touch with all his five armies. So that, once again, was that.

I laughed heartily at Rod Munro, the American correspondent, because he had rigged himself out in native attire and because Sonia was still at his heels. Many of us had formed the opinion that she was a German agent, watching his dispatches to that great neutral nation, America. But my laugh tailed off when I caught a glimpse, in a small village wine-shop, of a familiarly gay peasant blouse. It was Bluebell. The presence of the Yugoslav Government here was supposed to be a great secret. Then a Junkers 52, on reconnaissance, rumbled over us. I still prefer to believe that Bluebell had nothing to do with it—in fact I feel sure that she hadn't—but within a few hours we were all on the road again.

Next stop Sarajevo. By this time the convoy had to fight for its petrol, but never for food. This was something the Yugoslav peasants always gave us for nothing—another detail one can't help remembering.

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Our Chrysler died on this run, whether from shame or exhaustion I shall never be sure. It died on a bridge, so Maitland and I pushed it into the gorge. It was typical of Rod Munro that he forced his passengers to accept me as part of an extra load. Sonia gave me an unpopular look.

We re-grouped at Sarajevo's Hotel Evropa. No food and no light, but a roof. It was Thursday, April 10, Maundy Thursday at that, but we had lost track of time and of razor blades. There were mothers there with babies, and volunteer groups went out to commandeer milk.

We now knew we were heading for the Adriatic coast. There was an authenticated buzz that a British destroyer would pick up all those who had a reasonable claim on escape.

I was delighted to find Peter Brown all in one piece. Here was a man who knew the Yugoslavs and their language, a man whom the Serbs trusted as a brother.

"I can tell you one thing," he said, "the Germans won't bomb Sarajevo. Muslim community, after all. Daren't offend their religious susceptibilities."

This sounded fine.

"And another thing," he added, "don't tell a soul, but I believe the Yugoslav Press Department is here. We can slip out and send some stories."

Not a single correspondent had yet been able to tell London or New York of the Belgrade blitz. This is a special frustration which no one outside journalism can understand.

When the Germans started bombing Sarajevo, so contemptuously that you could see the bombs leave the hatches, Peter sniffed. There was no defence. The air raid alarm had to be given from the minarets, white, slender, and elegant, which were scattered about the city. The veiled women of Sarajevo scurried wisely indoors. It was plain that someone had told the Germans we were all here; not just the journalists, who didn't matter, but at least one enemy Legation and certain auxiliary services of the Yugoslav Government. There was nothing else in Sarajevo worth bombing, unless you counted minarets and bazaars as military objectives.

Peter's nerves, and my own, were getting ragged. Peter was livid at being still unable, four days after the event, to tell London of the blitz on Belgrade. Nor could he be entirely sure that his professional opponents, A.P. and U.P. of America, had not discovered a way of releasing their stories. The fact that he had been risking his life was unimportant: it was part of his job. All that mattered was getting the news out. I was suffering from a similar frustration.

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Peter said, " Let's go."

There was no sign for the moment of Rod Munro, no sign of Sonia, Russell Hill, or the others. No peasant blouse in sight either. John Segrue was making up his mind to try and make for Hungary. His wife was in Budapest and he was understandably worried.

We never saw him again. He died in an enemy camp.

In Sarajevo the trams were still running spasmodically. I knew that by now two rockets were probably on their fuses in London: one from Intelligence and one from the *Mirror*. Foreign correspondents soon learn that excuses are regarded as a weakness. A man is paid to get the news back and if he fails it's just too bad. This attitude applies also to espionage and often with rather more rigour. After three years in the spy trade I wasn't being a conspicuous success, and I knew it. But by getting a message through to the *Mirror* my more private bosses would at least know where I was. This wasn't much, but it would be something.

" Let's go," I agreed.

At the prospect of filing a message, our spirits perked up. In the tram we began to discuss, in English, how much we could send, and how best we could avoid repeating ourselves in the two messages. There would be bound to be military censorship.

" *Hände hoch!* " Hands up! A perfectly good English Colt revolver was thrust into my stomach. We were pushed up to the front of the tram and the other travellers were ordered back.

A small Yugoslav soldier, his eyes dirty and bloodshot, had arrested us. I had noticed him in the street when we left the hotel. At their end of the tram the passengers started muttering.

" Keep still, absolutely still," Peter whispered without turning his head.

The mudcaked little soldier started shouting.

" He's explaining," Peter said out of the side of his mouth, " that he has shot seven German spies already. Our friends in the tram are asking him to make it nine straight away. He is trying to tell them that there are new orders: German spies and parachutists have to be interrogated before being shot, in case they have any information. He has promised we'll be executed after we've been grilled. They keep asking him to shoot us, here in the tram."

Even if you have worked for only three years as an agent " in the field," your whole being rebels against being shot as a spy for the enemy. London always explains that you can't expect much help if you get into trouble, but I was now in a kind of trouble that I hadn't dreamt of. Any grave could be honourable except

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the nameless grave of a traitor. It was vanity perhaps, but that's how one feels.

"For God's sake keep *still*," Peter repeated.

The Colt was now pressed deep in my stomach. It was cocked and the soldier kept shouting. Two slabs of caked mud fell off his uniform.

The threat of execution is supposed to clear the mind wonderfully. I think this is only half true. In my case a clammy fear in the stomach fought a sense of impotent frustration in the mind. It was all so unfair! On top of this tumbled a weird medley of memories, each clamouring for recognition.

One thing I was glad of: nobody would be any worse off financially. I had neither wife nor dependants. At the same time my parents would be left with a loathsome doubt in their mind. I had never been able to tell even them what I was supposed to be doing in the Balkans.

I looked at the blue sky and the snow and they became immensely important. A dog snuffling round a lamp-post means nothing in the ordinary way. When you think it's the last you are going to see, it looks different. The dog was a yellow-brown cur, but I still remember it.

I remembered various girls—memories stretching far farther back than dear Bluebell. These memories became entangled with some short, jabbing prayers which were urgent rather than fluent. The soldier's breath in my face kept out poetry.

Somewhere in the suburbs the tram jerked to a halt.

"Hold it," said Peter, "here we go." I don't believe for a second he ever lost faith in his beloved Yugoslavs.

"Shoot them at once! Shoot the German swine!" the people in the tram were now screaming.

The little soldier turned his Colt on the crowd. "They will be shot," he kept repeating, "they will be shot! But first we must have their information. It is orders, you understand, orders." He showed extraordinary restraint. By shooting us there and then he would have become a temporary hero.

It had been snowing, but a thaw had set in and it was soft underfoot. At the striped sentry-box outside the barracks we were properly challenged. The bombing must have stopped for the time being: I remember how quiet it was. I longed to send a cable to my parents. After that I merely hoped the firing squad would be efficient. The rumours about German parachutists had made everyone trigger-happy.

We were bustled at the bayonet-point to the commanding officer. If this was a summary court-martial, "summary" was the word.

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"Your passports," he said.

We must have looked like a couple of tramps. We hadn't washed much since April 5 and had been sleeping in ditches. To our enormous relief he examined the passports the right way up: the soldier had tried to read them upside down. (The two alphabets are quite different.)

But in wartime a passport proves nothing. The officer started asking questions. I left the talking to Peter, who spoke excellent Serbian. Our guards were getting obviously restless.

Soon it was all over and we were embracing our captors. The officer toasted an Allied victory and the bloodshot little patriot snatched eagerly at our cigarettes. If it had been possible to get a message out, the officer would have helped us. "We need British aircraft," he said, "we need them desperately." But the Yugoslav Press Department had not reached Sarajevo. Would we like a military escort back to the Evropa?

The Hotel Evropa was more of a circus than ever. The Germans, after bombing the city, had sent Stukas to machine-gun the British Legation's private hideout a few miles away. We were once more in flight. The Germans knew everything.

Rod Munro had been busy on rescue work. Sonia had somehow commandeered a room in which he could occasionally rest. I found this quite funny—until somebody whispered in my ear.

"Bluebell from the Bristol," this man said, "is sharing a loaf of black bread and salami with two fleshy gentlemen in the restaurant. The little flower gets around."

I remembered how we used to pick out Gestapo men by the rolls of fat round their necks . . .

I am a coward. I didn't go into the restaurant. Thus it all ends on a question mark. I much prefer to believe that neither Sonia nor Bluebell was working for the enemy. By the time the Italians picked us up later on the coast, both girls had disappeared.

If there's a moral to this memory, I leave it to you. All I now remember is what it feels like to be taken away to be shot, and how easily good intentions disappear if you survive; but I can still truthfully say that I hope Bluebell lived happily ever after.

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PENNY ROYAL

The tax collector had arithmetic in his eyes

BY BERNARD WOLFE

SO it went, peaches all day, complaints all night. "If not too big a work, could you make the voice somewhat softer?" he said to his wife. "I pick the peaches ten large hours today and even my ears fall down from tiredness."

He refrained from observing that her tongue might soon fall down from its labours.

"Pick the peaches ten years and the house will still be small like no house," she said. "We are seven, we shall soon be eight, and we continue to live in a house with one room, not a house, a species of shed, and therefore we live like pigs and what do peaches have to do with it?"

He studied their own well-fatted pig that was down at the corner of the property, snouting some superior mud from here to there. He refrained from pointing out that this brute of theirs lived fantastically better than they did, having as many rooms as he had muds, no peaches to pick, no woman to make loud noises in his ears.

"We need at the minimum two rooms more," she said. "Then our neighbours will see that we are people and not some animals in a sty."

He adjusted his back to a more comfortable position against the adobe wall, wiggled his dusty toes, and considered the sun, which was dropping away behind the mountain like a darkening boil.

"I have explained before and I will explain again," he said. "To build even two small rooms requires many hundreds of adobe bricks. To mix the adobe, shape the bricks, dry the bricks, then further to place the bricks, is an immense labour. I pick the peaches ten hours a day for Mr. Johannsen and this is enough immense labour."

"And when you do not pick the peaches for Mr. Johannsen?"

"Then I pick the beef tomatoes for Mr. Predieu and the iceberg lettuces for Mr. Scarpio. When I am not picking other people's various things it is my taste to sit against the wall and pick my teeth."

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" For that," she said, " it is first necessary to chew on something."

" I agree with a whole heart. I will ask only why you bother to make this very true and intelligent observation? "

" Because if you do not build the two needed rooms you will very soon be without the things to chew on. Do I make this plain? Your cook will be home in Durango, where human beings do not live like animals."

She went in the house with both hands made into fists, her rounded belly leading the way. Five children's voices came up in a soprano thunder, asking Mama, dear and nice Mamacita, for some pieces of crisped tortilla.

Life could be hard in this California. Troubles here had the tendency to grow like peaches and lettuces, in bunches. Though it was to be understood that even the much-accepting Herminia would not wish to bring up still another child in one cramped room. Yet adobe bricks would not grow in bunches like peaches, lettuces, and troubles.

He got to his feet and walked down close by the pig to the well to get himself some water. Standing there in his envelope of constant trouble, the tin dipper at his mouth, he said more or less to the pig, " I wish I had the miraculous penny."

This was what people like him sometimes said when they felt their troubles forming into a sealed envelope, themselves inside.

The pig manœuvred over on his back and flopped his happy feet in the air, perhaps trying to kick the sun.

From the bottom of the well a voice said, " What? "

When spoken to, Diosdado liked to give straight and full answers. So he explained, " I was speaking of the penny that never ends, that when it is spent is replaced in the pocket with another penny. It is the poor man's idea of great wealth, of all the riches of the world, to have a penny in his pocket that always gives birth to another penny—"

Diosdado realised that he was leaning into the well, talking to somebody at the bottom of his well. He leaned over some more and said, " What do you think you're doing there in my well? "

" I do this without thinking," the voice said, " because it's my job and the thing I'm trained to do. These days we all specialise."

" What is that, your job? "

" Listening. You think it's easy when you mumble? "

" Then you listen to this," Diosdado said. " This is my well and I want you to get out of it and off my property."

" This well," the voice said, " is as much Mr. Bixby's as it is yours."

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" Who owns a hole is who did the digging. You go back to this liar of a Mr. Bixby of yours and you—"

" Man, will you use your damned head for once? For more than to keep your ears in place? You dug this hole, yes; what belongs to you is the hole. You did not make the water that comes into the hole, I stress this, the water comes down from those San Berdoo mountains, from certain forest lands owned by a certain Mr. George Carol Bixby. Now, will you stop wasting my time and answer one simple question? Did I understand you to say you would like the miraculous penny, the never ending penny? "

" These were my words. It is only an expression—"

" All right."

" What did you say? "

" I said, all right."

" All right what? "

" All right, you can have the never ending penny. You've got it. Spend it in good health."

Diosdado turned a sympathy-seeking face to the lurching, wallowing pig. " Mister," he said, " you get down in my well where you have no right to be, a person I have never been introduced to, and you tell me bad jokes. It is impossible to have such a thing as the never ending penny. This is only something people wish for. It is an express—"

" I know what it is without speeches from you," the voice said. " The self-perpetuating penny, you might say, is my business. If you don't want it, fine, just say so. If you do, it's yours. What coins have you in your pocket? "

Diosdado made another face at the pig, one pleading for the two sane parties left in the world to join against a general madness, and pulled all the coins from his pocket.

" Four pennies, two dimes, and a quarter. This is what I have in my pocket and in the world."

" Fine. Now, put this single penny back in your pocket."

" If it gives you pleasure."

" Now take the penny out, then feel in the pocket again."

Diosdado withdrew the penny, placed it in his right hand, reached inside again with his left.

There was another penny in his pocket.

He pulled this one out and explored once more.

There was a third penny.

There was a fourth. There was a fifth.

When there were fifteen or more pennies in his sweaty hand he looked for explanations to the pig, with beggar's eyes. The

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pig was busy juggling the sun with his trotters. Diosdado began to shiver.

He thought he understood, partly, anyway, the excitement of this moment. Once when a boy in Durango, while walking down a country road, he had seen a shine in the dust. His foot explored the mystery. The shining objects were bright new centavo pieces. At the sight of these unexpected riches he had felt precisely this kind of throat-tightening and eye-widening heat in a flash flood through his body.

For one ballooning, scooping moment Diosdado had thought, What a glory if this place of miracles should turn out to be a well, a cornucopia, a production line of pennies. Can there be too much of a good thing?

Now here he was, he, Diosdado, with the dream of dreams in his pocket. He was a small boy again, kicking at the Durango road and finding the road fully co-operative, sensitive to his balloons and scoops of moods, jumping to his large orders.

"If you have the power to give this thing," he said shakenly into the well, "why do you give it to me, a nobody?"

"For one thing," the voice said, "you asked for it."

"It is enough only to ask?"

"Oh no, oh no, we can't go around giving these things out just for the asking. A lot of our countrymen come up north here, you know, many of them have troubles and ask for the repeating penny. We follow them and we listen to them. In my territory, for example, Southern California, I give out two or three of these pennies in a year, an average year. There's no set quota."

"People around here call for the miraculous penny all the time, why am I the one to get it, sir?"

"One, you're a steady worker. Two, you don't spend all your earnings in the nearby bars. Three, you're reasonably good to your wife, though you make silent comments at her. Four, you have another child coming and could use the penny, or think you could. Don't ask for more reasons. Let's just say I like your curly hair."

Diosdado scratched his head. Absentmindedly he pulled two more pennies from the production line in his pocket.

"But listen, if two or three people around here get the penny each year, how have I never heard about this?"

"News like this doesn't get around, fellow. The owners of these family-bearing pennies develop a very strong urge not to tell anybody about it. You'll see."

Diosdado pulled three more coins from his penny garden of a pocket.

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"I've got to run now," the voice said. "But one more thing. I have the power to grant you two wishes. Now you have the first."

"And the second, what is that?"

"You make the wishes, I grant them. Do you expect me to do all the work around here?"

That night Diosdado did not eat his supper. The kids hooted and threw frijoles at each other and he sat there over his food seeing and hearing nothing. The newly-acquired pennies in his pocket were a ton of hotness against his thigh; several times he was on the verge of blurting out to Herminia the incredible thing that had happened but each time his tongue got stiff.

Herminia wanted to know why he did not eat his frijoles. He said he had eaten many peaches this afternoon at Mr. Johannsen's and was not hungry. With embroidered casualness he announced he was going to cut some kindling and went out.

As soon as he was inside his wood- and tool-shed he bolted the door and went to work.

Diosdado soon discovered that he could pull pennies from his pocket at the rate of one a second, sixty a minute, three thousand six hundred an hour. This meant he was making thirty-six dollars an hour, roughly what he got for a full week's work in Mr. Johannsen's orchards. It was good pay for a job that could be done with one hand, without climbing a ladder.

For one hour he stood drawing out the coppers and dropping them on the dirt floor. His arm was tired, a cylinder of hurt. He thought he might sit down for a time but it was too hard to reach into his pocket from a sitting position. Next he tried taking his trousers off and lying down, but it was a strange thing, the penny would not reproduce itself when the trousers were not actually on his body. He had to become a rich man standing up. At the end of the second hour he had almost seven thousand pennies on the floor, almost seventy dollars, and his arm was full of fever and gassy beer, there were shooting pains from the wrist to the shoulders. He was getting rich and he was getting lumbago.

He considered how much faster the harvesting of this penny crop would go if he could call in Herminia and the kids to help with the picking. With his whole family working they could go through the night in shifts. But it did not seem right to bring others into the secret, not even his near and dear.

Herminia called to him to bring some wood and he answered that he would be right there.

Now there was a problem. He could not leave a small fortune

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in pennies lying around in plain sight on the shed floor. He felt it was better if his family did not know about the pennies that grew like toadstools that wish to make headlines.

In the corner were some coarse burlap bags, left over from last year's flood season when he had prepared sandbags to build up the banks of the nearby stream. His seven thousand pennies almost filled one bag, which he hid under some odds and ends of lumber.

He went towards the house wondering why it was that he kept looking back. He was about to be the richest man in the world and he looked over his shoulder as though he had something to hide.

During the next days, whenever he had a minute, he went to the shed to pull pennies and fill burlap bags. Before the week was up he had to buy a new supply of bags at the general store, and his arm was so sore that he was not able to pick many peaches for Mr. Johannsen.

Finally he had so many full bags that there was no way to hide them in the shed. Some new thing had to be done with them to keep them out of sight.

He began to discuss the matter with himself.

"What are pennies for, exactly? For spending, this is certain, yet I do not consider the possibility. Why not? Well, the first thing is, there is no way to spend ten thousand pennies, then ten times ten thousand, and so on. If I ordered adobe bricks from the brickyard and offered the man bags of pennies for them he would say, Where did you get all these pennies, Diosdado? Could I answer that I got them from my left pocket, boss? He would get suspicious and tell the chief of police about it, or the tax collector, or both.

"Pennies can be deposited in the bank, of course, just like dollars. Yet peach pickers do not usually have money of any type to place in the bank. The president of the bank would think the matter over and report it to the tax collector, or the chief of police, or both.

"There is but one way. I must hide these bags from all eyes. From my wife and my children, them especially. I did not know what a trouble it can be to have money. Surely it is not robbery if I take pennies from my own left pocket, so why do I feel like a robber and keep looking over my shoulder?"

So he did not spend the pennies. Neither did he tell his wife about them. He hit on a way to hide the bags. He ordered a quantity of planks from the timberyard and these he placed firmly in the ground in upright pairs, exactly along the lines

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where the walls for the extra rooms would eventually have to go. Between each pair of planks, using them for supports, he piled a vertical row of his plump bags, exactly as he had piled them to make a new bank for the flooding stream. Each bag contained ten thousand pennies, one hundred dollars' worth of pennies. The piles formed continuous walls, they looked exactly like walls.

Herminia watched with narrowing eyes.

"You wanted more rooms?" he said to her. "How can I make rooms if I do not first make walls?"

"I tell all the neighbours you are a good husband," she said, "but now I see you want to kill your whole family. What way is this to build walls without adobe? Make walls of sand and when the bags rot away in the weather the walls will fall down on our heads and we will be killed and buried in the same time. True, this way we save burial expenses. We have to cut down somewhere."

"This is a new procedure of making the bricks," he said, hating himself. "First, a special sand is put in the bags, second, they are permitted to shape and harden in the sun. It is a totally new process, woman. It was invented by the authorities on such things in the U.S.A. Department of Agriculture, Adobe Brick Division. Those of the government know the wall business better than you."

He wanted to kick and punch himself when he saw the full trust and respect in her eyes. But at least the pennies would be safe in this homemade bank. Because of the protecting planks the children could not feel around with their fingers to find out that these walls were filled with a sunshiny sand of dreams and sayings.

But the chief of police did take notice. He saw the walls going up and he drove in to have a look.

"Pretty big house you're putting up there," he said. "Where'd you get the money for the materials? Come on, Diosdado, come clean, you rob a bank somewhere?"

Diosdado said he seldom had the occasion, let alone the constitution, even to go in a bank, let alone rob it; the funds came from picking the good peach crop.

But the chief's words were a worry.

The tax collector came by too.

"You're turning the place into a regular mansion," he said with too much arithmetic in his eyes. "A four-star palace. You must have had a peachy year, ha, ha, to afford improvements like these." There were dollar signs in his eyes as he drove away.

This was another worry.

By now the walls, the deceitful walls, were up ten feet or more.

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Diosdado took a pencil and paper and did some figuring. According to his count he had piled up two thousand bags, which came to twenty thousand dollars' worth of pennies. He was a man worth twenty thousand dollars and he did not have the cash to go in the store to buy a side of bacon or a new kitchen table, let alone more burlap bags. Added to this, the chief of police and the tax collector had their mathematical eyes on him.

To collect bigger and bigger monies and to be further and further away from the possibility of spending them, to do all this heavy work and have no pay from it, nothing but some false walls put up with backbreaking labour, more labour by far than it would have taken to make true and useful adobe walls, that is, walls about which a man would not have to tell rotten lies to his trusting wife, this did not seem reasonable. His arm was very tired. It hung limp at his side, a tube of misery. He was now the slowest picker in Mr. Johannsen's orchards.

He decided that, for the time being, he would not collect any more pennies.

Easier said than done. How do you go about throwing away a breeding penny like this? A damned rabbit of a penny? Several times, in disgust, he tried to fling it from him. Each time, its twin brother turned up cosily in his pocket.

He began truly to hate this penny. He had not had a good night's sleep for weeks, even before the visits from the township officials. He had the stronger and stronger feeling that, ever since he had begun to collect the pennies, he had been involved in something criminal, something absolutely against the law. He was looking over his shoulder all the time now. His neck was getting as stiff as his arm.

He consulted with himself once more.

"I see why I have broken no law, yet feel like the Number One on the wished-for list of the FBI. I begin to see. This is not my money, though it happens to be in my pocket. It is not money at all, though it looks and feels like true money. The difficulty is that if you are given the magic of the seven-year-old you must begin to think and act like a seven-year-old in order to enjoy the gift.

"Why do I not speak to my wife any more? Because my pennies are the only thing I can speak of and they are the one thing I must not speak of. Why can't I tell Herminia about the pennies? Not because of the danger she might talk. Not that so much, though she is a champion talker. Chiefly because if I spoke of this magic she would see the seven-year-old in my eyes again, and this is not for a woman to see in a more so than not grown man. Why do I feel I am breaking the law? Because the first

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THE
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law is to act your age, which in my case is thirty-nine and not seven.

"This calamity of a penny cuts many inches off my height and how tall is a man to begin with? Besides, my arm hurts all the time. I must get rid of this affliction and plague of a penny."

But how lose a penny that won't get lost?

Standing by the well, speaking more or less to the upside-down pig as it pranced pointlessly, he said, "I certainly wish I'd never heard of this miserable penny."

From deep in the well there was a sound like the rush of wind. After a few seconds the voice said as though from far off, "I'll be right there."

Diosdado waited. Pretty soon the voice came through stronger, though panting a little, saying, "Sorry to keep you waiting."

"I have a worry," Diosdado said. "It seems to me there is something illegal about this magic penny."

There was silence for a while. Then the voice said with some irritation, "Look, up there you make laws, down here we make pennies. It's a division of labour. Don't tell me your troubles, I've got enough of my own."

"But I have to live with the law," Diosdado said, "and this penny is clearly against the law. I will tell you my thinking. There are only so many pennies in the country, an amount fixed by the government people. Therefore, if you put a large number of them in my pocket you must be taking them out of somebody else's pocket. If you are a true magician why do you have to be a thief? More, you must be robbing the poor, because it is chiefly the poor who save pennies. I have no use for the whole system."

"Didn't you hear what I said?" the voice came back. "We don't steal the pennies, we make them."

"Then you are counterfeiters. Isn't this a violation of the law, to counterfeit?"

"I don't have to sit here and take your insults," the voice said. "These pennies are most emphatically not counterfeits. We follow the specifications of the mint people of the U.S. Treasury in making these pennies, so-and-so much copper, such-and-such percentages of other metals, everything down to the last decimal point. We use no inferior materials, each penny we give you is a perfect coin of the realm. There's not a bad penny in the lot."

"All the same, all the same. There are supposed to be a certain number of pennies and no more. It's not right for me to have the power to add a million or a billion billion billion; this could

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upset all figures and banks. It must be against the law for a peach picker to have the power to overthrow the monetary system."

"You didn't call me over here to discuss the monetary system. What's really on your mind, man?"

"I don't want this penny."

"All right."

"What?"

"I said, all right. Throw it down here."

Diosdado drew the coin from his pocket, breathed deeply, and dropped it down the well.

Time passed. There was a sound, not of splashing, rather of a big and drawn-out yawn, accompanied by a flatted whistling. He thought he heard the ringing of a cash register from far away.

He reached into his left pocket. It was filled with a glorious emptiness. He felt a weight of some long tons lifting from his shoulders.

"This is the second wish?" he said.

"Precisely," the voice said.

"Those who make the first, they always make the second?"

"Almost always. As soon as they find out they can't spend these pennies, keep watching over their shoulders, stop talking to their wives, get funny looks from the tax collector, and so on."

"Nobody ever keeps the penny?"

"Since I've been on the job here there was only one man who didn't try to give it back. He was a gardener and tree pruner over at La Jolla. He went round telling everybody in town he had a nice mama penny that kept making little baby pennies. This is not the kind of talk people wish to hear from a grown man, an experienced gardener and tree pruner. They did not wait to see the breeding penny demonstrated, they quickly locked him up in a hospital for people who make wild talk.

"Good-bye, friend. Maybe you've learnt something from this. You *can* get too much of a good thing. But don't write the experience off as a total loss. You've got something to show for it. Just take a good look around. Good-bye now. Got to rush. Bye, bye."

Diosdado looked around his property. He saw a well, a shed, a hut, a mud hollow, a self-inebriated pig, in that order—nothing new. What did that voice mean, he, Diosdado, had something to show for it? All he had for it was an arm that was a hose made from end to end of major ache, and this was not to be shown.

But then he saw something that had not been there before the trouble-making penny. Attached to the original hut were two unusually large, very luxurious rooms, or almost rooms. Add ceilings and finish the walls properly and nobody could

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take them for anything but rooms. They were most emphatically not banks, because though monies had been deposited in them these monies were not for withdrawing. The walls could certainly be finished in the right manner. There would be no withdrawals from this gone-out-of-business bank.

Herminia came over to him from the hut and he put his arm round her, saying, "Woman, you talk too much, but from time to time you say something. It is true, without adobe those walls do not work. Whatever the Agriculture Department says, those bags of sand will rot in the weather and make troubles. I will put plenty of adobe over the walls, on both sides; also, I will add ceilings, and you will have the two largest rooms on this side of the San Berdoos. Then my cook will not go back to Durango and I will always have something to chew on before I pick my teeth, yes?"

"Agreed. This is a business deal not to be turned down." Herminia put one arm round his waist, then the other.

For over a week Diosdado picked no peaches. He worked round the clock, placing boards to make a roof, mixing adobe and plastering it over the bags and their wooden supports. Finally the walls, and also the roof, were covered with solid, substantial, homey-looking adobe. No rains could get in here, and no tax collectors.

The afternoon Diosdado finished his labours he walked over to the well with Herminia and turned to take a good look at the finished structure. It was a real house, a good house, the best-looking house in the valley.

"This is a house that could not be paid for in pennies," he said, half into the well, half towards the wallowing pig, very little for Herminia's ear.

With her tendency to comment on everything, Herminia said, "There is not enough money in all the world, pennies or dollars, to pay for this house," and put her arm round his waist.

He patted her promise-leavened belly and looked down into the valley towards the other huts and cabins nested here and there. He wondered how many other homes in this valley had twenty-thousand-dollar walls, but he was afraid to speculate about this too much.

Down in the mud hollow the pig rolled on his back like a millionaire on holiday, trying, for lack of anything better to do, to punt away the molten centavo of a sun.

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IMNESIA OR ANSOMNIA?

I was sound awake all night.

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GIRL IN A BLUE DRESS

His hand enveloped her with warmth and sweetness

BY KRESSMAN TAYLOR

IT WAS A FEAR in Ellie Pearl that the scent of the trees was too sweet and strong in the first dark, with wet-earth smell and pine-pitch and needle smell, like when she was knee-high and ran barefoot and knew every trail in these parts, pine land or granite, able to run quick and true without counting where she laid her foot. It came back too strong now, she treading up the steep last stretch through woodland, treading pine needles dry and slick—sliding in her town shoes with their smooth leather soles.

Crickets' song was loud for company, with the trees so black and thick that through the cracks in the woods the night sky looked lightened. A little hoot owl hooted up on the mountain, and the sound trembled down to Ellie Pearl like a fear. It was a safe sound, a scared, safe sound, like the trees moving a little in the dark.

She said, " Give me room now, please; give me time. Don't hurry me. Because I didn't expect to be so *acquainted* again, not all at once."

When she came to the creek where the log went over, she had to stand and listen to the water rushing. It kept coming down and coming down like this all the time out of nowhere up in the mountain, and going away down valley; she had never seen where it went. She had to squat down and feel out for the log with her hand, the water was so black dark.

She felt the top of the log where the wood was part rotted and broke loose in light chunks, and then the underside, bristly with moss and damp. She thought how she would surely catch the heels of her shoes and fall if she walked across, and felt her dress that was of blue rayon and brittle as paper and had cut-glass buttons that sparkled in the light of day, and she couldn't think what she would do if she got it wet. It was a strange thought that she didn't care so much whether she got it wet or not,

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here in the woods with all the smells and sounds of the night.

Finally she took off her shoes and stockings and held them in one hand and her suitcase in the other, and went out on the log and felt crumbly wood under her bare feet. The noise of the water came from no direction, and halfway over she was tipsy in space and had to bend down and find the log in front of her by feeling. Her stockings caught on the wood and she thought probably she had torn them, and there was a feel of cold air from the moving of the creek water, on her face, and the smell of wood rot from the log. She went half stooped over, feeling ahead with her feet.

Where the log ended she jumped down into high grass and sat, and the seedheads rasped her elbows as she put her shoes and stockings on again because of how she wanted them to see her when she came to the house.

It was a funny feeling, sitting there in the dark.

For a minute she didn't know who on earth she was, and the five miles back down mountain to the road, where she had left the bus—the five miles in the lessening light—were clear, every step, rough track and rock slab, cedar and madrone and huckleberry thicket; but the bus was as if she had only dreamt it, with the plastic-leather seats and the driver with a big mirror by his head to look back in and watch everything, and still keep looking out at the road ahead, the big bus roaring straight along or sweeping and sliding to the edge to stop, with one roll of his arm and his head held high and proud, without noticing the passengers who got off or got on.

And still, where she had come from, she didn't know, although that very morning the city office where her typewriter sat over in the corner by the window, had seemed nice and the only real place in the world. And Mr. Brian from the sales department, always touching her elbow when she sat down to take dictation, Mr. Brian with a polish on his clothes and skin, like a bun newly buttered, had been exciting, the way he looked at her out of his half-shut eyes, going along with the dictation but letting her feel that he hardly paid any attention to it, the way their eyes once in a while kept meeting.

He had taken her to the movies six times and had told her about his savings account, and had kissed her respectfully after the second time, with his little moustache bristling her upper lip. And now he was like nobody at all or somebody she had dreamt once somewhere . . .

She was tying her shoes and rising stiffly to her feet in the thick grass, moving ahead into the resinous air of pinewoods once more, and the swooshing of the water quietened until she didn't

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hear it any longer, and the quiet sang in her ears and there was no break in the blackness. She kept on moving uphill, sliding on pine needles.

She must have gone off the path somewhere in the pines, for when sky broke through ahead she was at the high edge of the woods, and there was the old rail fence that bounded the lower pasture, set here and there with boulders that whitened in the starlight. She laid down a rail and climbed across, minding her dress, and caught the odour of woodsmoke and plodded clumsily along the rough ground until she saw the loom of the oak trees that shaded the house and the sudden lighted square of the kitchen window with the lamp behind it.

Mama was flouring down a big round of dough in the bread bowl on the table. The same yellow oilcloth as last year, only the corners broken through and the yellow worn white on top. And Grandma in her rocking-chair, her head dropped over, travelled away somewhere in sleep, a little lightweight woman, her nose and mouth drawn close together like a cat's in her shrivelled face.

The lamp was one spot of brightness in its bracket up on the wall, its chimney smoked a little but not blackened. Papa and Lucy sat in chairs by the stove, Lucy with her hair put up and reading the catalogue—the wishing book—the way the two of them both used to together; and Papa stooped and tired, with his hard thick hands, wrinkled at the knuckles, at rest on his knees.

Mama said, " Ellie Pearl! "

Nobody knew much to say, and Ellie Pearl opened her suitcase on the floor and gave out their presents, one at a time. She had brought Mama a bottle of violet perfume, with a picture of violets on the bottle and a gold string tied round the neck, and the stopper painted gold; and Papa a one-pound can of tobacco, a round can painted red with the picture of a pipe on it. For Lucy she had a ring with a blue middle stone with a little hoop of glass diamonds running round the edge.

The ring fitted Lucy's middle finger, and Lucy liked it there, and Ellie Pearl felt a wide sad distance spreading between her and her sister, because Ellie Pearl had learnt, living in the town on the railroad and the highway, what finger a ring ought to be worn on.

For Grandma she had bought a square silk scarf with bunches of blue roses on it, that had cost a dollar. She had presents for the others, too, but her brother True had gone down to the Grange to a dance, and the other children had gone to bed already. She missed seeing them tonight, because she had just one week's

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holiday and then she would go down again to the road and get on the bus and go back.

In the morning she put on her old red dress that she had left here in the wardrobe last year, and her old flat mountain shoes, almost worn through, that she had left behind. The morning air was chilly for August, and the wood range, crackling hard and shooting flames up the stovepipe, felt good.

Ellie Pearl took the water bucket and went out to the pump; and out under the oak trees, the morning coldness and the clean smell of the air surprised her. It surprised her that she had forgotten what it was like to go outdoors in the morning, with everything smelling as if it had been made new in the night, with spiderwebs dewy in the grass, and the sky paling and losing greyness over in the east.

She primed the pump from the can and began to work the iron handle with her arms that were strangely unused to it. But she hadn't got the water up yet when a big brown hand out of a blue shirtsleeve took hold of the handle.

She let go, and True did the pumping for her in strong-man style, standing easy at the knees, his big shoulders lifting powerfully and falling again. There was the faint earth and sweat smell about him that belongs to a man, and Ellie Pearl found herself in her mind looking down a long tube, like looking into the wrong end of a telescope, where in a tiny place she remembered the morning smell of pavement and petrol fumes, and a man-smell that was woollen cloth and some sort of sharp spicy lotion.

True said, " You going back again? "

" Of course," she said, because of course she was. " I finished the typing classes, and now I work for Goldring and Sons, and I've saved twenty dollars. When I've saved fifty, I'm going to take book-keeping."

True said without emphasis, " Tige Tigard had Margaret Walton with him at the dance last night."

" Well, let him," Ellie Pearl said, and thought how the mornings were pretty cold up here in the mountains, and put Tige Tigard aside. She said, " Should I help you carry that bucket? " True laughed at her and took the full-to-spilling bucket and clumped up on to the creaking board porch.

Mama said, " I'm glad one of my children had enough get-up-and-go to her to take herself out of these hills."

Papa didn't say a word.

" A man don't know," Mama said. " Hoein', bakin', scrubbin', washin', cookin', from dawn till dark." Mama had eight children.

Lucy said, " Don't forget mending and churning and canning. And—" she was looking hard and angry at her hands, lean and

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brown like a boy's—" scratching yourself picking blackberries and cutting yourself skinning rabbits."

And, as if she had the firm meaty body in her hands, Ellie Pearl suddenly felt again what it was like to skin a rabbit, the head with its furred ears looking dazed but as natural as life, and the knife slicing down the middle, making a slit down each leg, and the limp pelt slipping off all in one piece, like a coat.

Ellie Pearl crouched on the soft earth of the garden under the noon sun and picked stink-bug eggs off the squash vines and put them in a paper bag to take in and burn up in the stove. The sun was hot and the weeds smelt dusty.

Mama made too much fuss, she decided, about her, Ellie Pearl's, job . . . She made it almost so Ellie Pearl couldn't come home and feel at home, and her little brothers, Henry and Loyal, and baby Sophia had been made to act embarrassed and didn't make up to her, so that she'd had to give them a lot of hugs and then knock them around a little until they'd got over it and acted natural. Mama had no call to act that way. It wasn't as if Mama had done things for her, although Mama had always pushed her on and encouraged. She, Ellie Pearl, had made up her own mind.

She'd worked and paid for it all, too. And now she had nice clothes, and she and another girl where she lived shared a bathroom with a looking-glass and a white bathtub with real water coming out of the tap.

Mr. Brian had told her that when he got married, his wife wouldn't have to get her pretty hands rough and red because he was going to have a dishwasher installed and other labour-saving devices. Mr. Brian got discounts on almost everything because he knew the angles. On her birthday he had given her a silver-cloth evening bag and in it a silver compact for powder, with a vase of flowers on the outside in blue enamel. Mr. Brian had got the whole thing at half price because he had a connection in the store where he bought it. Ellie Pearl didn't need any encouraging about living in town, because she had done it all herself and she liked it.

Late on that Sunday afternoon—Ellie Pearl had come home on Saturday—an old car came bouncing and jolting along the ruts in the road, and it was Ellie Pearl's two married brothers come over to see her and bringing along their wives and a jug of cider.

They all sat out on the porch, and Ellie Pearl learnt the major events that had happened during her year of separation. Mahlons and Caswells had gone to court over the water rights from Sucker Creek, and Chip Mahlon was supposed to have opened a box

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the watermaster had sealed, and stolen water that belonged on down-creek below him.

There had been two or three marriages, none of them surprising except for the fact that the girls were Ellie Pearl's age or even several years younger; and for a while she thought about telling them that people in town usually didn't get married so young, but then she didn't because it might sound critical.

Swallows were skimming and sailing down to the eaves of the low-pitched barn and out again, flying smooth the way they did, without having to beat their wings. Down in the pasture somewhere a calf was bawling. True told how in April Tige Tigard had shot him a mountain lion and had the skin tanned for a rug. He didn't look at Ellie Pearl, but it was her he told it for, because the others knew about it already.

The valley had grown dark below, and when the mountainside began to darken there was a sickle of moon, a little bigger than a new moon, up in the sky in the west. Ellie Pearl first saw it over her right shoulder, white and thin in the deepening blue, lifting its lower point to hold water off the earth. Maybe even if it wasn't quite a new moon, she would have luck because of seeing it over her right shoulder.

When the men came up from the barn from chores and milking the two cows, Mama called them all in to supper, and there she and Lucy had made a cake and had turned a freezer of ice-cream. The ice-cream had a taste of gunny sack and of salt from the rock salt and ice in the freezer, and all of a sudden that taste made her so homesick to be a little girl again that she wanted to put her head down in her arms and cry her grief for what was lost, lost to time, and never could be gotten back . . .

It wasn't till Tuesday that Tige Tigard came by, and then it was to return a horse-collar he'd had to borrow to get his alfalfa hay in, because the hames were broken on his own. It wasn't like Tige Tigard to care enough about farming to bother borrowing a horse-collar; it was surprising. Tige would always rather hunt up in the hills.

Ellie Pearl had forgotten, until she saw him come riding into the yard, how big he was. There he was, getting down from his horse, a big, tall, broadshouldered man with longish dark hair slicked back and with a firm mouth in his sun-browned face, and a hunter's eyes, always looking off over the edge of the world where his feet would prefer to be loping.

Two years ago Tige Tigard had paid down on his land, a high piece up near the pass, about twenty acres of mountain meadow with a good stream running through it, and a considerable piece of virgin timber along with it. The house on it wasn't much

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more than a shack, but Tige had built him a porch on the front where he could sit with his feet on the rail and look off down the valley.

Tige Tigard had on a clean blue workshirt and wore a hunting knife. He stood alongside of Ellie Pearl in the yard for a while without saying anything, and she was conscious of the man-size of him stretching up solid-bodied and easygoing there next to her. Then he asked Ellie Pearl if he could take her to the dance on Saturday night.

Ellie Pearl felt pleased to know that Margaret Walton didn't have him all tied up, because she felt Margaret was a girl whose nature didn't show much promise, at least not for a man like Tige.

"I'd be pleased to attend the dance in your company, Tige Tigard," Ellie Pearl told him.

Tige Tigard looked down at her through squinted eyes, and she fairly had to look up at him. "You're talkin' pretty fancy, ain't you, Ellie Pearl?" he asked her, and there were little lights in his eyes like a smile.

"I see no reason why I can't talk nice if I know how, Tige Tigard," she answered him, and she didn't know why she was so vexed and discontented with herself.

Ellie Pearl was fretting more than she ought to have, being at home and nothing happening to unsettle her. Sometimes everything was easy and long-accustomed and she was purely happy, like scouring up the old tin pans to make them shine and smelling the fresh bread out of the oven. But sometimes, especially when she walked up-mountain on to the granite, where she had loved the outlook best ever since she was small, she would sit down on the hard rock, ridged white rock with its granular markings of gold and of black—so beautiful it was the pick of all rock—and watch the lizards scuttle and run and the sky one sheet of plain blue over her head, and all the joy of it was sunken and lost and she just ached and hankered inside, and she didn't know what for. Because everything was just fine.

They liked having her home and were proud of her, and there was the office and everything to go back to, and Mr. Brian and the movies, and newspapers and everybody walking in the streets and she taking her sure part among them. And here she was sick and lonesome, but not lonesome for anything she could think of, because she had it all, everything she wanted; and she still was just hollow with lack.

On Friday morning she mentioned the trouble to her grandma, after she had set a chair for the tiny old lady and settled her out

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in the oak shade in the side yard with her Bible in her lap.

Ellie Pearl sat herself down in the deep green grass, cool and kind against her bare legs. " Grandma, what's the matter with me? I ought to be happy, being here, and I'm just perfectly miserable."

Her grandma's puckered little face wavered and then steadied on her. " You bought your pretties, child, and you're paying the price, paying the price," she pronounced.

" What you yearn for and cling to dries in the hand," Grandma said, and her old hands twisted together in a wringing motion. " Make your bargain with the Lord, and your punishment is that what you get is what you asked for."

" But I know what I want," Ellie Pearl tried to tell her. " I'm happy about everything I've done. Only I'm just not *happy*," she said lamely.

" I could have had my joy, but I chose the things of this world. The kingdom of heaven is a pearl of great price," the old lady whined in her thin preaching voice. " Sell all that you have and buy it." Her little head drowsed on her neck.

On Saturday, the morning of the dance night, Ellie Pearl put up her yellow hair in the aluminium curlers she had bought in the five-and-dime in town, so that her hair would be in short curls all over her head, the way she looked so nice. Tige Tigard wouldn't know it was fashionable, but it was. Then she laid out the silver evening bag and put a handkerchief in it.

Tige Tigard came for her in a car. It wasn't his; he had borrowed it. He let her get in by herself, and she remembered for a minute how Mr. Brian held the door of his Chevrolet open and held her elbow until she got settled.

Tige didn't drive her straight to the dance. He took them around a back road to Eagle Rock, where they'd gone climbing once, a long time ago, and there he stopped and they got out. She didn't want to sit down on a rock because of her dress, but Tige sat down on a low boulder with his legs stretched out in front of him. He had on a new levis and a red plaid shirt, and his forearms were big and solid and bare. There was a half moon high in the sky, and she could see him plain, and the white granite above them and down below a stretch of pinewoods running away like water under the moonlight.

" I painted my house," Tige said after a while.

" You did? " she said. " What colour? "

" Well, red," Tige answered, and that made him angry. " Red barn paint. You don't think I could afford house paint at six dollars a gallon? "

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She shouldn't have said that, and she looked around for something else to say. "That's a fine pair of boots you've got on," she said, and they were fine, coming clear up to the knee and very supple and beautiful and well built.

"Handmade," he said. "Thirty-five dollars." And that got him even madder than before, and he shouted at her. "Oh, you," he shouted, "you don't know anything!"

Ellie Pearl felt terrible because they were quarrelling already and because she had belittled him to himself. She walked away a few steps down the road that was white with granite dust and chips, and her high heels wobbled on the uneven surface. Then she just stood still and waited.

There was a sound somewhere in the night, distant and high and strange, and as she waited it got louder and was a stream of wild incessant calling out of the high sky.

"Listen," she said, and Tige had heard it and was looking up.

In a minute Tige saw it and pointed, but she couldn't find it; and he came over to her and turned her head up more to the north, and there they were, dark against the light, a vast V of wild duck travelling south, outlined in air below the moon. As the flock streamed out, their continuous high chatter floated down like muted talk to the two on the ground there, out of the sky.

They watched without moving, still as the mountainside around them; only their heads turned to follow the flight as it wheeled above. As the thin lines faded in moonlight off to the south and the girl and man began to steady a little, there was again the high hooting palaver in the air, and there came another great V, and still another, trailing along half the sky and shredding a little unevenly and then re-forming in the straight and lovely lines, more birds than you could believe the earth could breed.

They two stood very close together and without speaking watched them fade south across the zenith, until the last lean echo died. "Early," Tige said at last. "There'll be early frosts in the fall."

"How can they tell?" Ellie Pearl said painfully but insistently. "How do they know?" She teetered a little and his big hand steadied her.

"They've got to," Tige answered her coldly. "They know it, and then they've got to." He stopped because a shame took him to put things into talk.

Ellie Pearl looked up into the whitish sky, thinned of stars because of the moon. She put her manicured white hands on Tige Tigard's forearms holding her, and the long corded muscles

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were solid ropes under the brown skin, and she wavered but hung on to his silent hardness.

Then Tige Tigard just moved and swung her, his hand holding her against her ribs. He put his other big hand on the back of her head and pressed her mouth hard to his mouth and she could see his lashes as spiky shadows against the moonlight.

His body in the red plaid shirt and the stiff levis was firm and alive against her. He smelt like whisky and apples, and Ellie Pearl swung like the earth in its orbit under the pressure of the man and the mountains and the night.

When the silver evening bag slipped out of her fingers on to the road she didn't even notice it go.

His head was a cloud of pure strength above her lifted mouth, and under his clothes his body was burning with wanting her. His hands moved down her sides, and she said, "No, Tige, no," but his hands enveloped her with warmth and sweetness and lifted the blue dress and trembled on her thighs. "Tige, no."

But his face nuzzled her throat, and his breath was furious and fierce, his whole body thrusting upon her, his hands brooding. "Ellie Pearl, Ellie Pearl, give . . ." The word broke on her like light and was the door to all the giving there was in her and shattered her stern intention and was the dear resolve to her want. When he bore her down on to the rough granite, she turned to him and helped his fumbling hands. Oh, Tige, oh. Oh, honey. Even with her face buried in his hair, shadows of her future years like black bird-wings swooped down around her and showed her plain as writing, amid her joy, the coming cruelty, the hardness, the long dearth, the pain; and she welcomed them and hugged them, together with the body of the man, to her breasts.

Breathing softly, they lay still, their faces touching, not wanting to move although the ridges of the granite cut into their shoulders, while the natural soft noises of the earth thrummed out a chorus in their ears. Before she stirred at last, it came gently to Ellie Pearl that her twenty dollars would buy a sow to start them raising pigs for next year's ham and bacon, to hang in the cellar of their red house with the lionskin rug, up there in the mountain meadow among the peaks.

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Kressman Taylor sure enough knows about things like barn paint and sows, for she lives on a farm in Gettysburg—besides being Associate Professor of English at the nearby college. Her novel Address Unknown, an American bestseller, was published this side the Atlantic as well.

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THE EVIL EYE OF BROTHER POLIDOR

I was sure. It was not a thing about which to make a mistake

BY YOUNGMAN CARTER

EVERY secret admirer of rascals has a favourite character. Some settle for Casanova the great lover, or Cagliostro the sorcerer. For me it has always been Brother Polidor, a comparatively obscure monk reputed to have the true secret of the evil eye and to have received the formula from the Devil himself.

Brother Polidor was burnt at the stake in the year that also saw the death of Joan of Arc. This was in the great square at Cacharel, and his crimes included heresy, blasphemy, and of course communication with the Devil in person.

At that time both towers of the Abbey looked down on the scene, for this was before the Tire-Bouchon, the famous Twisted Tower of Cacharel, crashed to the ground to emphasise another death, that of the last of the real Kings of France. And if you ask local opinion, so ended the greatness of France, for both happenings were contrived by the Prince of Darkness.

There is of course some doubt about Brother Polidor. The Abbé of Cacharel, writing some twenty years later, says, " He gave up his spirit almost before the kindling wood had begun to crackle or the smoke enveloped him."

Writing from Mont St Michel in 1462, Brother Francis, his confessor, said, " Of the manner of Brother Polidor's death there is much discourse, some holding that the Devil himself carried him out of the smoke, meaning to burn him eternally as it should please him. Though earthly fire may not have consumed him, his spirit seemed to depart before the brands had flamed, perhaps by reason of a poison or the executioner's dagger used in mercy on a most unworthy sinner. The pile did burn a day and a night in despite of foul weather and no part of him, no, not so much as his heart, remained."

Later in the Chronicle, the old man says, " Of Brother Polidor's black chest, said to contain a treaty with the Devil and much else

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that did offend, no remnant was ever found and that in defiance of a great search by the Abbé of Cacharel himself.

"Polidor was said to open it only in the dark, for what it contained was writ in letters of fire from the pit. Yet though fire doubtless had him at the last, for his proven sins, many say he did not die at Cacharel but escaping by aid of the executioner or the Devil travelled to another kingdom. This I do doubt."

In the records of the municipality of Cacharel, the entry runs, "The ex-communicate Monk Polidor was this day burnt at the stake having been delivered into the hands of the civil authority by the powers spiritual as guilty of sorcery, blasphemy, heresy, and communication with the Devil. Wood supplied by foresters to the Abbey. Executioner: Master Gaston of Cacharel."

There is no more contemporary material about Brother Polidor in his death or his disappearance, but he established a small legend, nurtured by charlatans for a credulous public. Every confidence trickster and apothecary in that line of business since then, including Cagliostro himself, has claimed to know the secrets of Brother Polidor's black chest. They assumed not unnaturally that he was looking for the philosopher's stone.

He lived in an age when every landowner of pretension had his own shady alchemist charged with research into the transmutation of metals and the elixir of life.

Polidor has some success still recorded to his credit in the matter of plating metals, before plating as such was understood. He used saturated acid solutions, but his results were not permanent for nothing remains of them.

His local reputation was as the possessor of the evil eye.

Women lost unborn children, cattle died, and crops failed, so he was informed against, prosecuted, and sent to the burning. It is a grim but not uncommon story, for in those days the Devil danced one New Year's Eve in the very square that saw Polidor's farewell, and left footprints in the snow, upon pavements and roofs alike, to prove his presence. In the forests of Cacharel he frequently played the fiddle and was known to hold court with followers not of this world.

And of course he pulled down the Tire-Bouchon—the Twisted Tower of Cacharel.

He was here, there, and everywhere, and probably one man in three could swear to having met him face to face.

The whole story would not be of anything but antiquarian interest except for one item which gives rise to modern speculation. The municipal record again is the source.

"Paid to Master Hugh de Soissons, woodcarver and clerk, for the keep of two children, sons of Gaston de Charel, Executioner,

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two silver pieces. The father having been seized by the fiend on the feast of St Etienne, 1431, and the children starving."

It means in fact that within a fortnight of Brother Polidor's demise, the one man who was really close to him at that fatal moment took to his heels and was never seen again.

Brother Polidor, as I have said, has always been my favourite minor figure in the great tapestry of French history. He rates so few, so very few, personal stitches, but he has an individual look in his eye that promises excitement, could one but force him back as it were out of time and make him give up his secret.

He was never burnt, I decided, but escaped with the connivance of Gaston the Executioner: there must have been a pact between them, and pacts contain mutual considerations. The black chest of Brother Polidor must be the answer, and if one knew what it contained one would have the key to the mystery. The evil eye? The elixir of life? Perhaps they solved that ancient riddle and are still living, a couple of wandering Christians, travelling the face of the earth in an eternal search for death.

Only at Cacharel is there any real substance to the legend. The house of Gaston de Charel, the Executioner, still stands in the square, for his two boys, it seems, prospered as craftsmen and established a line running through many generations. They were workers in metal, making lanterns, sconces, and sometimes, in more delicate generations, jewellery.

Within living memory, my own for example, the old shop under the high grey stone house had a board which said:

BONNARD PERE ET FILS

Successors to Decharel Frères

and old Bonnard, a great-grandson of Bonnard fils, I believe, carried on a ramshackle business making heavy and peculiarly ugly costume jewellery until quite recently.

When I was last there, only two years ago, the shop had been sold to a chain of cheap jewellers who were gutting the ground floor in order to install an exotic bow window, complete with neon lights. It was a melancholy business for the shopfitters destroyed some fine stone mouldings, and nothing I could say was successful in rousing the conscience of the local authorities. I contented myself by making a friend of the foreman in charge and purchasing from him a couple of heavy carved stones.

He also brought me secretly to my hotel a piece of broken early eighteenth-century jewellery found under a floorboard. I paid over the odds for it in aid of our friendship and in the prudent hope of favours to come, and in this I was rewarded.

His name was Jean-Louis Poupart and he had a shambling walk almost like an ape's, which made him seem undersized, an

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effect increased by a very low forehead, cropped hair, and a perpetually secretive look. Despite this he was not entirely stupid and he had at least the sense to perceive in me a source of revenue. On this occasion he sidled up to me so furtively that he was sitting beside me at my café table in the square and pulling gently at my arm before I noticed him. It was late in the evening and I had started my final fine à l'eau.

" My friend," he said, " I think you should walk across to the shop. Not at this moment, but when you have finished your cognac. Come by the back in the Rue des Epiceries. I have found something."

He was shaking all over with excitement, even his face twitched.

" Be very careful," he whispered, " no one must see you. If you have a torch, bring it with you. Wait ten minutes to be sure you are alone. I have found treasure, great wealth without a doubt . . ." His words were hissing out of his mouth like a faulty tap. " It will mean thousands of francs, a fortune—you'll see—you're an educated man, a scholar, you'll show me how to deal with this, how to keep it safe for me—when to sell it in the highest market. Don't make a sound—I'll let you in."

He shambled off with such an air of melodrama that had there been anyone interested at that hour they must have remarked his crablike scuffle into the shadows. All the same he vanished within seconds, having infected me with a great part of the excitement which was shaking him.

I paid my dues as casually as I might, collected a torch from my hotel, and did my best to walk unobtrusively.

Poupart was waiting for me, a shadow within a shade. He locked and bolted the door behind me, although the whole front of the house stood open, a wilderness of planks, paint pots, and scaffolding. We moved silently down a greasy passage which I could feel rather than see, and turned sharply through a door which my nose told me led to the cellars. Here I was allowed my torch and in the long vaulted room lanterns were burning.

Now I can give no valid reason for feeling frightened, except that the place was cold and the shadows in this incredible junk room were grotesque as if they were thrown by a dozen warring spiders suddenly immobilised. I remember a great collection of old travelling-trunks, heaps of bottles, a carpenter's bench, a lathe of sorts, and various pulleys, wheels, and decaying ropes.

We ploughed our way through this chaos to a wall where evidently the wine cellar had once been, for there were little arched caverns barely high enough to stand in. I could just detect that the last of these had been bricked up many years before, and it was to this far corner that Poupart was moving.

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He picked up his two lanterns and stood for a moment with one in each hand, breathing heavily so that garlic mingled fiercely with the stink of decay. Then he placed them on the floor and began to move the packing-cases which stood against the far wall. They had been hiding a newly-made gap in the brickwork, a jagged black shape, which curiously enough resembled a question mark.

"It's inside there—the treasure—I've seen it," he muttered, and went to work with a crowbar.

The bricks prised away easily enough. Finally he stood back and let me flash my torch inside. It was a smelly dark cavity. I thought it empty, but Poupart's eyes were keener than mine.

"There it is," he said. "Just a few more bricks and I can get at it. Stand back."

There was certainly a box of some sort inside, but it was so grey with dust that I had mistaken it for a slab of stone. Within a minute he had wriggled half his torso into the hole and dragged it out. He pulled the box slowly towards him, gripped it, and with a final effort wriggled himself back as I pulled on his legs.

At last it lay on the floor between us. For a moment or two we eyed it warily as if it might bite us.

"There's nothing else inside the hole," said Poupart. "This is it—the treasure. Open it. Without doubt it is full of gold."

I did not answer him directly, but found a piece of sacking and began to clean it gently. There was no doubt in my mind that this was indeed Brother Polidor's black chest, but as I removed the centuries of dust certain peculiarities began to emerge.

In the first place it was not one wooden box but two, side by side, and they were clamped together by a flat rib of greenish black metal, probably brass or copper. On this strip was a handle rather like that of a modern petty cashbox. I lifted it cautiously, but it broke in my hand.

Poupart whispered, "Open it, open it."

"Not here," I said. "This must be done very carefully. Bring it to my room, and bring some tools, a chisel and so on."

He was in a cold sweat of excitement, suspicion and greed fighting for a decision. It was difficult to convince him that it would be criminal to smash the casing for its contents. But there was something very peculiar about the precise and careful clamping of the treasure that made me equally obstinate. In the end I won by promising to buy the boxes separately for myself regardless of what they might contain, provided they were intact.

We agreed after great argument to meet in my hotel room.

At this point, for I had time to pause and consider, I blame myself bitterly for not solving the matter and so avoiding a tragic

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mistake, but like Poupart I was obsessed with preconceived ideas. Just as he was certain of finding gold, so was I confident of finding documents that would make footnotes to history.

We were both of course completely wrong.

When the discovery at last was placed on my rickety hotel-bedroom table carefully covered with newspapers, Poupart re-assured himself that the windows were shuttered and the door locked. He laid out a handful of tools and we considered the problem. It was not very intricate and with a little persuasion the tired metal was lifted away and I was able to look at the two boxes separately. They were of exactly the same size, made of ebony, but one had what looked like a glass boss sunk into the centre of the face which had been against its neighbour.

Poupart, his teeth chattering, said, "A jewel—a diamond!"

Even then I did not understand, except to suspect that this indeed was the evil eye of Brother Polidor.

My fellow conspirator was so anxious to pull the thing apart that, to divert him, I decided to concentrate on the second box which promised to be easier to open. It had a hinged lid, very beautifully fitted, and a brass catch on the protected face still in working order. With remarkably little persuasion it opened.

Inside were half a dozen thin flat metal oblongs fitted snugly into grooves which held them separate and rigid.

Poupart, seeing that they were not the treasure he was expecting, gave a hissing sigh of disgust; but I, like a fool, began to pry further. Gingerly I pulled at one of the metal rectangles and after some little difficulty I lifted it out.

It was dark and smooth and had the appearance of gun metal, but as I turned it to the light I saw that there was an impression on the surface. An engraving, I decided, or some form of mezzotint. By slanting it gently it was possible to see what it represented.

Here I got my first glimpse of the truth. The view, for that was what it undoubtedly was, showed the square of Cacharel dominated as ever by the Abbey. But this was Cacharel with a difference, it was Cacharel as it had appeared five centuries ago. Cacharel as seen by Brother Polidor himself. Here was the Abbey, still recognisable, but both towers were standing, and the higher of the two was the almost mythical Twisted Tower, the incredible Tire-Bouchon itself.

I held it closer and closer and suddenly realised that the image was fading. At last, too late, I had in my hand the secret of Brother Polidor.

He had made a camera.

What I was holding in my hand and destroying for all time was

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a sensitised photographic plate, which I was stupidly gawping at under a bright light.

It was too late to remedy matters. I switched off the light and put back the metal sheet as best I might, but the damage was done. No one apart from myself will ever be able to say, "I have seen the Twisted Tower—the incredible Tire-Bouchon."

It was very difficult to explain to Poupart what I was up to, and just what our discovery might be worth.

Now, a full year after our adventure, Brother Polidor's evil eye has been officially examined and placed in the appropriate museum, the secret is out. It is a primitive but remarkably accurate camera invented centuries before its time, with a beautiful and accurate handmade lens. It is the forerunner of the daguerreotype, but it would seem that the little monk had not found how to preserve the plates against light, though he may possibly have known how to inspect them through red glass. This is technical speculation and I believe the experts are still working on it, for we do not know how he sensitised the metal.

No impression was found on the remaining plates and possibly some of them were never exposed, or perhaps—and I am haunted by this fear—I destroyed them by exposing them under that merciless bulb. This dreadful speculation occupies all my nightmares and I shall never be free of it . . .

This is why I must add a postscript, which is no sort of story for scientists. The truth is that Poupart also pulled out a plate that evening and was gaping at it just as stupidly as I, when I realised what we were doing. I snatched it out of his hand and had just one instant's glimpse of it before it vanished for ever.

It was a photograph, quite unmistakably of the Devil. Of this I am sure, because it is not a thing about which to make a mistake. One cannot dilate upon evil, or even describe it: it is a matter for feeling and personal recognition.

You can if you wish take my word for it. It is no use asking the scientists, the historians, the theologians, or even Poupart himself. But it is certain that he was as shaken as I at the time, by this frightening thing. They have all talked him out of it and he now agrees that it was a close-up of one of the gargoyles on the lost Tower of Cacharel.

But I, and Brother Polidor, know better than that.

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SEE YOU LATER?

Before fording the river, do not curse the alligator's mother.

CHINESE PROVERB

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SEVEN LIES SOUTH

Brilliant new two-part ADVENTURE

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By WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

WHEN Beecher started for home it was dark but the streets were gay. Spanish girls walked arm in arm, through the streets, with jasmine twisted in their dark hair, and the cafés were crowded with sun-flushed tourists. An accordionist played vigorously on the terrace of the Bar Central and dogs wandered among the tables feeding on bits of shrimp and fish.

Beecher's villa was on an inland bluff with an excellent view of the sea. The house was old and not particularly comfortable in the winter months, but the rooms were large, and the grounds included brilliant gardens and a small but charming swimming-pool.

Beecher parked in front of the grille gate and walked through the garden to the side entrance. The maids had heard the car, for Encarna was standing in the doorway watching for him in the darkness. She and her sister, Adela, had taken care of the villa for more than a year.

"There is a young lady waiting," Encarna said.

Beecher was in no mood for visitors; he had played golf that afternoon with a tall, bony, fair-haired opponent named Lynch who had cheated him out of the match at the eighteenth fairway. The incident had depressed him; the deceit had been gratuitous and totally unexpected. Jimmy Lynch had seemed a model of the sporting virtues—this Beecher had inferred from his rambling conversation which had been studded with references to the proper clubs and schools. And then, to win a friendly match, he had driven Beecher's ball into the turf with the heel of his boot.

Beecher had felt sorry for him. And sorry for himself. Because he had wanted to win. Losing, he had begun to suspect, was becoming a habit with him. Losing at everything . . .

Beecher walked into the drawing-room, which faced the garden and the sea. The fire was lighted and there were bowls of fresh flowers on the tables and mantelpiece. A blonde girl in a slim brown dress was sitting in one of the leather armchairs.

She stood up, smiling.

"I'm Laura Meadows. That won't mean anything to you, but I'm a friend of Bunny's."

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He found himself smiling. "And how is Bunny? Did she send any messages?"

"No. It was the oddest thing. I hadn't seen her in years, until I bumped into her shopping in New York just a month ago. I told her I was coming to Spain, and she told me you were living here. She was going to write you, but I begged her not to. I know what a bore things like that are."

Beecher felt pleasantly stimulated. "Well, how about a drink?"

"Thanks. I'd love one."

Beecher made two drinks with care, and as he measured gin and lemon juice into ice-filled glasses he tried to analyse the current of emotion that was running through him. It must be that he was lonely for someone who looked and talked like Laura Meadows, he thought . . .

She symbolised everything that was beyond his reach: the rosy, prosperous life of America, with the tides of success sweeping everyone on to fat, fine futures. She made him nostalgic and he hated it; he despised this self-pity. But he couldn't help himself.

At thirty-eight, no one was clamouring for his services, and baiting their offers with homes and pension plans. There was no reason for him to go home. Nothing to do, no one to be close to except his kid sister, Bunny, who still thought of him with adolescent pride and respect.

There had been a girl named Alison around for a long time. She had been waiting when Beecher returned from his first war. Not for him particularly, but for any deserving veteran with his feet on the ground and his shoulders braced to support mortgage payments, dental bills, and education insurance. She seemed a wise and happy girl, with round, clear eyes and a snug, welcoming body; the answer to prayers that popular magazines had put in the mouths of returning soldiers.

He had played tennis and golf with Alison, and put in two unmarked years acquiring "experience" in a broker's. By then, their names had become hyphenated in their little crowd: Mike-and-Alison. It took Korea to break it up.

Alison was married when Beecher returned from Korea three years later.

After Korea, the '50s seemed to shoot past. There was nothing in his life but chance friends, girls, and the routine of work he didn't seem cut out for.

He finally made a decision, while waiting for a bus on a grey and windy afternoon in New York. The bus wasn't going anywhere he wanted to go. And neither were the ones chugging in the opposite direction. He decided to come to Spain.

He withdrew his savings, almost ten thousand dollars, and bought a ticket for Madrid.

Now the money was about gone. And all it had bought him was idleness and irresponsibility and cheap drinks. And time was racing by just as it had in New York.

"Well, here's luck," he said, and handed a gin with lemon punch

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in it to Laura Meadows. "When did you arrive in Miramar?"

"Just this morning. I came over from Gibraltar by bus."

"How long will you be here?"

"Until Monday night. I'm flying down to Rabat. Then back to Madrid, you know, the Prado, Toledo, and Escorial," she said, smiling and ticking the names off on her fingers.

This was Friday, Beecher thought. She'd be in Miramar two full days and nights.

He realised that he would have to put on some kind of show for her; Bunny would expect it. The problem was pesetas; he was damn near broke.

"Well now," he said. "What do you want to see and do?"

She sat back, smiling. "I meant what I said about not being a nuisance."

"Don't be ridiculous. It's a pleasure."

"Are you sure?" Then she laughed. "I'm going to call you Mike. All right?"

"Sure."

"I'm still slightly in awe of you, I'll confess. I met you once, but you won't remember. I was visiting Bunny, and you were home on furlough. I was twelve and had big shining braces on my teeth."

"Most of Bunny's friends had braces," Beecher said. "I don't remember yours specifically. Now tell me about your trip."

"It started in Paris. I took a room on the Left Bank . . . It was wonderful. Then I went on to London." She sighed. "I'll hate to go home."

"Where is home?"

"New York, and work," she said.

"What kind of work?"

"I'm with a commercial film company. Cigarettes that dance and beer bottles that sing. It's hectic, but I enjoy it."

"Where are you staying?" he asked.

"Pez Espada."

"When I came here two years ago, this was a proper village. Now it's blown up into a miniature Biarritz." He was chattering pointlessly to keep her from leaving. And he experienced then a familiar and distasteful foreknowledge of defeat; he wanted to please her very much, not for Bunny's sake, or to salve his pride or ego, but because he liked her and wanted her to like him. And when he wanted something very much, the odds always adjusted themselves against him.

"Listen to me," he said quickly. "How would you like to go to a party tonight?"

She smiled politely. "But I'm not invited, am I?" she asked him. "And I'm obviously holding you up. No thanks, Mike, I must run along."

"Please sit still. Everyone's invited to Don Willie's tonight. He'll be delighted to have you."

"You're not just being nice?"

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"Not at all. Please say yes."

"But I'll have to change."

"That's fine. I'll put on a jacket and take you to your hotel. Let me freshen your drink. I won't be a minute."

"No, thanks." She smiled and stretched her legs towards the fire. "I'm fine. Take your time."

Beecher closed the glass doors of the living-room and walked down the hall to the telephone.

Sighing, he gave the operator Don Willie's number. There was a long wait.

Beecher sighed again, already regretting his impulsive decision. Don Willie was a former German Army officer, who had been living in Spain for the past fifteen-odd years. He now had his plump fingers in a dozen rich pies throughout Spain. His parties were lush and splendid, but Beecher never attended them; until now he had had no intention of qualifying or suspending his dislike of Don Willie for a plateful of food and a few free drinks.

Don Willie's voice exploded in his ear, high and tense and irritable.

"Yes, yes? Who is it? What do you want?" Beecher could imagine him shouting into the phone, flushed and excited, anxiously checking last-minute party preparations.

"This is Mike Beecher." He couldn't make himself say Don Willie; the title was pure affectation, and Beecher salvaged some pride by not using it.

"Yes, yes, yes," Don Willie cried, in a rush of sibilants. "What do you want?"

"I'd like to come to your party tonight," Beecher said. "Is that all right?"

"I have asked you before, you say no, you are not interested. I am hurt by these things. Why do you want to come tonight? Why are you interested?"

"I have an American friend who would enjoy your party. She's a young girl, and this is her first visit to Spain."

"She would like it, no? And you, Mike Beecher? It is not interesting to you?"

"Oh, I'd like it too, of course." Beecher sighed and hauled down his pathetic little flag. "I'd be delighted."

"There is a large crowd already."

"Well, if we'd be in the way, Don Willie . . ."

Beecher knew that this was what Don Willie wanted to hear; the title ringing over the wires.

"Another time, Don Willie," he said. "But thanks anyway, Don Willie."

"No, no, you must come to my party. I am happy to have you and your friend."

Don Willie's villa, The Black Dove, was built high on a rocky bluff above a shining crescent of beach. There were cars lined up on both sides of the arched entrance. Beecher parked fifty yards

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away, and helped Laura pick her way up the stony road. They could hear music and laughter beyond the high white wall that surrounded the gardens.

There were at least a hundred guests present. Beecher saw Lynch standing head and shoulders above the crowd, his fair hair and happy smile shining in the candlelight. He wore a blazer, and a red silk cravat knotted loosely under the collar of a white shirt. Beecher felt a twist of irritation at the sight of him.

He wondered at it. Their match was over, safely mothballed with other unimportant defeats. Why did he care now? He wondered if it was because of Laura.

She stood, smiling expectantly but uncertainly, a hand resting on his arm for assurance, and he would have liked to feel secure and confident about something, if only from winning the match this afternoon.

Don Willie came striding towards them with both arms stretched wide in a gesture of paternal welcome. He reminded Beecher of a beardless Santa Claus, with his stout body swelling against a white silk suit, and his pink cheeks glowing with an air of breathless jolliness and excitement.

Beecher introduced him to Laura. Don Willie's eyes glinted with appreciation; he bowed over her hand with a massive formality, but, as Beecher knew, the main object of this lingering courtesy was to allow himself an unhurried view of her slim bare legs and ankles.

"Now I will show you my home, no?" Don Willie said. He was obviously pleased by Laura, and flattered by her smiling interest in him. They went into his villa with Don Willie parading before them like a dancing bear, literally hopping with pride and enthusiasm.

The villa was large and the furnishings excellent. There were rooms full of Spanish chests, austerely carved and dark with time, immense leather chairs and sofas, and brass trays and candelabra shining like old gold in the soft light. But in spite of high-ceilinged rooms, the effect of spaciousness had been obliterated by the clutter of curios, souvenirs, mementos, and relics which Don Willie had collected in his travels.

After this tour, Don Willie asked Beecher if he could take Laura with him and introduce her to his friends. He laughed and pounded him on the shoulder. "I do not steal your girl. But I have knowed, I mean, I have teached—" He shook his head in frustration. "I have learnt—ha, ha, that is it! I have learnt the best thing is to cut all the couples up. It makes things go better."

"You go ahead," Beecher said to Laura, who was watching him with a smile. "I'll catch up with you in a few minutes."

When they had gone into the garden, Beecher drifted from group to group towards the sound of music. He collected another drink from a passing maid. Lynch waved to him. There was a crush of people between them and Lynch cried, "A little dissipation will take the edge off your golf."

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Beecher held up his glass. "I'm working at it," he said, and walked on to the foot of the garden.

A girl in a white blouse and a full red skirt was standing alone at the swimming-pool, smoking a cigarette. It was Ilse, the young Austrian girl who lived with Don Willie. She turned at the sound of his footsteps and smiled shyly at him. "Hullo, Mike."

"Hullo yourself. Brooding?"

"No, nothing like that. I was listening to the music, watching the sea. It's strange to see you here."

"I know." He felt uncomfortable. "There's a first time for everything, I guess."

"Why don't you like Don Willie?"

"It's nothing important," he said. "We just have a slight disagreement about the best uses for ovens and barbed wire."

"It's the war, then," she said slowly.

"Come on now. It's too nice a night for this sort of talk."

"All right. I saw the girl you brought here. She is lovely. Is she an American?"

"Yes."

"Some American women look like window dummies," Ilse said. "But she is different. She's got some sense, I think. And personality."

Beecher smiled at her; Ilse was about twenty-two, he guessed, with a spare, childish body, and a delicate, impassive face. He was amused by her air of cynical wisdom.

"Why are you here, Ilse?"

She looked up sharply, and a curl of her short black hair fell across her forehead. "You know why," she said, and pushed it away with a swift, angry gesture. Her eyes were like diamonds in her small, pale face. "I live with Don Willie."

"Yes, I know that, Ilse," he said.

"And you think it is disgraceful, don't you? Everyone here thinks so. You wonder why I am alone. The Spanish women pretend I don't exist. The foreign women are worse. They think I could do better than Don Willie. If I painted my face and bought the right clothes, I could go to the Riviera and find someone much better. Then I could live as they do, with villas and young French lovers. Isn't that what they think? But do you imagine I care?"

"People don't think about us as much as we imagine," Beecher said. "They've got their own problems."

They sat on a low stone bench and Beecher put his drink on the ground and lit a cigarette. They were in the shadows of a bougainvillaea vine, but the lanterns filtered through the leaves and purple streaks of light shone into the darkness at their feet.

Don Willie came down the steps then, with Laura and Lynch. Ilse rose to her feet. Don Willie stopped and patted her arm. "You are hiding here with Mike, eh? You must meet my friends. This is Mr. Lynch, and my American friend, Miss Meadows. They are so glad to be here. They love my party."

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Lynch said, " I'm going for a refill. Can I bring anyone a drop? "

Neither Laura nor Beecher needed a drink, and Lynch gave them a smiling wave and started back towards the bar on the terrace.

Ten minutes later the fireworks started with a roar: an explosion sounded, and a whistling, jet-stream of sound streaked towards the sky. For an instant an expectant silence held the crowd; then a brilliant red-and-yellow catherine wheel flew apart high against the darkness, and there were screams and cries of excitement and approval as the embers flared brilliantly, and died in the night. The fireworks were being set off in a cleared area beyond the swimming-pool, and Don Willie was in charge of the preparations, shouting orders to his servants, and clapping his hands like an excited child when the vivid burst of colourful lights exploded against the moonlit sky.

He was assisted by his pilot, Bruno Hoffman. Bruno was an irritable, taciturn man in his middle forties, whose customary expression was that of someone who had just encountered a disagreeable smell. Not much was known of his background, except that he had been a pilot in the Luftwaffe and had joined Don Willie in Spain at the end of the war. He spent little time in Miramar; most of his flying was done between Spain and various countries in Europe. Beecher had chatted with Hoffman several times in the village. Don Willie's personal plane was a modified B-26.

After the fireworks, a flamenco troupe appeared on the terrace, and the crowds moved up the garden to watch them dance. There was the hoarse croak of honda, and gipsies in polka-dot dresses pounding out rhythms with calloused hands and worn-down heels.

A slender Frenchman ran from the crowd to join the dancers. With his back arched and fingers snapping, he capered about clumsily but happily. He was very drunk.

" What's this? " Laura asked Beecher. " Is he part of the act? "

" No, just the inevitable amateur."

" Do the gipsies mind? "

" They're used to it. But Don Willie won't like it."

The Frenchman's name was Maurice. He had been around the village for a week or so. Beecher had seen him in the bars and cafés, usually alone, and usually drunk. The waiters told Beecher he was a bad man, a man in trouble, with no money and no friends but the brandy bottle.

Maurice had a cold, narrow face, and theatrically long black hair which flowed back from his forehead in carefully sculptured waves. The wings of grey at his temples looked silvery against his dark, flushed cheekbones.

He was thirty-eight or forty, but it appeared that he had ridden through those years at full gallop; his eyes were staring and strange, with a milky shine, and he seemed to be boiling inwardly with hostility and frustration.

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As Beecher had guessed, Don Willie wasn't amused. He strode on to the terrace, took Maurice by the arm, and led him forcibly away from the dancers.

It was much later—after a great deal of food and wine and moonlight—that Beecher took Laura back to her hotel.

Laura's silence seemed happy, but Beecher's was thoughtful. Two puzzling things had happened to him at the party: first Maurice, the Frenchman, had tried to pick a quarrel with him. He had obviously been spoiling for a fight. Beecher had refused his drunken challenges.

The second occurrence had been even more preposterous; Don Willie had offered him a job. In Morocco.

"Well?" Laura looked at him with a smile. "What are you thinking about?"

"The job."

"I think it's exciting. Are you going to take it?"

"I don't know. There's one large inducement, however. Don Willie wants me to fly down to Rabat with him on Monday on the 11.30 p.m. flight."

She seemed confused. Then she gave a cry of excitement. "But that's when I'm going! Are you going too? Please! Don't make me drag it out of you. What kind of a job is it?"

"Don Willie has a broker's office in Rabat. They're selling desert development issues. Oil, water, ores, that sort of thing. I speak Spanish, which is a qualification. Secondly, I'm an American. Don Willie seems to feel that investors will equate that with fiscal solidarity."

"What did you tell him?"

"That I'd think it over." And he would. Beecher needed a job, and this sounded like a good one. But Don Willie's proposal had put all his problems in an uncomfortable focus; it had been consoling to maintain that he was old for the pace of America, spiritually and emotionally out of touch with its confident, driving expansion. This qualified him to sit in the sun and drink until his money ran out; but Don Willie's offer couldn't be evaded so conveniently.

It was work he could learn. And the salary was good. He had no excuse unless he confessed frankly that he was too insecure to try his hand at it.

Beecher realised suddenly, and unhappily, that his gloomy preoccupation had changed the tone of their relationship. Everything had been fine until now: light, casual, refreshing. But it had fallen apart in the last few minutes. Laura was staring out of the window of his car, a pensive little frown clouding her pale face. Was she bored? Was she planning how to get rid of him neatly and politely?

In the lobby of her hotel, Beecher asked her if she would like a last drink or a cup of coffee. She smiled and shook her head.

"It's been marvellous, but I'm tired, Mike."

She didn't look tired: everything about her was glowing, blonde

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hair and blue eyes, smooth bare arms and shoulders, all of it shining and fresh in the dimmed light of the lobby.

" I had a good time, too," he said quietly.

" Mike, aren't we silly? What's wrong? " She stood on tiptoe and kissed him on the lips. " Aren't we friends? " she said, smiling. " Are you going to ring me tomorrow? "

Beecher was too surprised to say anything for an instant; he was conscious of nothing but the heat in his face and that he was grinning like a fool. " Yes, yes," he said, blurting out the words.

The next morning, Beecher drove to the Irishman's pub, a bar with the dimensions of a railway coach; a narrow and dimly-lit haven for anyone weary of castanets, flamenco, and the bright, boisterous tones of Spanish bars and cafés. There were murals of city scenes done in a heavy black line on the blue-grey walls, and no entertainment except muted recordings of show tunes, and an occasional irrelevant bit of Gilbert and Sullivan.

The Irishman's name was Donald O'Brien. He was slender and handsome, with brown wavy hair, friendly eyes, and sharply defined features. His complexion was fine and pale, with touches of vivid colour just above his cheekbones.

His manner was reserved but friendly, and rumours attached themselves to him like steel filings to a magnet; in a society in which everyone was addicted to confessional outpourings, the Irishman was that frightening and mysterious person—someone who kept his mouth shut and minded his own business. Lacking concrete material, the village invented scandal; it was said that he was up to his pink ears in smuggling; that he kept a harem of black and white girls in Tangier; that he had a bastard son high in British politics.

The Irishman kept his mouth shut . . .

Late one summer evening Beecher was half asleep on a beach a dozen miles from the village. He had been roused by a creak of oars. Sitting up, he had seen the silhouette of a motor launch against the blurred horizon. Beecher had wanted no part in this, but while he was getting into his clothes someone had seen him; in a moment, he was facing a group of Spaniards and talking to the Irishman.

" Your boat? " Beecher had said, with the inane feeling he had when making conversation at a cocktail party.

" As a matter of fact, yes. She's registered in Tangier. The captain's got engine trouble. Brought her over for me to take a look at it."

Ten yards away from them stood an orderly heap of boxes and cartons piled up on the beach.

" That's nice," Beecher had said, ridiculously.

" Awkward if you're seen. People talk."

Beecher had wondered then how it was going to turn out; they'd hardly shoot him on the beach, he decided.

" Well, you can't blame them," he said. " People like things

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tricked up. The simple explanation doesn't satisfy them. I prefer the easy way. Accept what's offered."

"That's a good way of looking at it."

There was a pause, a silence.

Then the Irishman had made up his mind. "Good night, Mike. Drop in when you can at the bar. I think we may be getting some good whisky in."

That had been a year ago. They hadn't mentioned the incident since. And they were still friends . . .

Now Beecher lit a cigarette and drummed his fingers on the bar. "Don Willie's offered me a job, Donald. Selling stocks and bonds in Rabat. How does that sound to you?"

"Hm. Might be a good thing."

"For me or him?"

"Well now, Mike, that's hard to say. Here, let's have a peg." Donald O'Brien poured two generous dollops of whisky into a tall glass, added cubes of ice, and made a concession with a mere splash of water. "Now, what were you saying? Oh yes. Don Willie. The job and all that." He frowned faintly. "It's a curious coincidence. I was thinking of asking you to come in with me, actually. I need someone who speaks the language to keep tabs on the waiters."

Beecher smiled. "You're a liar, Donald."

"On my word, Mike. I was thinking of it only yesterday."

"Don Willie's offer stinks. Is that what you mean?"

"Well now, I wouldn't be saying that, Mike. But you don't have to accept it. Remember that."

Beecher smiled again. "I've got two offers to sleep on now. I'm becoming a celebrity." He realised abruptly that this was close to the truth; an odd lot of people were suddenly paying attention to him. He had lived inconspicuously in the village for two years, idle, insignificant, unimportant. Now things were starting to happen to him.

It was flattering in a way, of course. But he couldn't see any reason for it, and this disturbed him. "Thanks, Donald," he said, and he wasn't smiling any more. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Later, Beecher packed a lunch in the back of the car and drove off to fetch Laura. They swam that day at the foot of a steep cliff, off an isolated beach. The mountains behind them were shaped like a band shell, deflecting the wind sweeping over the baking tablelands, and keeping the water in the bay as still as a mill pond.

That evening they spent in a crude, earth-floored bodega in Malaga, a gamy and smoky place with ancient black barrels standing in rows behind the bar, and a waiter who kept count of their drinks by chalking numbers on their slate-top table. They ate ham and cheese, strong, goaty manchego, and tiny birds cooked in garlic and oil. The place was a favourite of Beecher's and he was happy that she liked it.

It was very late when they got back to her hotel. She was almost asleep on her feet. But she smiled when he kissed her lightly on

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the forehead. There were a million stars in the sky and a great wind coming off the mountains as Beecher drove back to his villa.

The next day—Sunday—they went to the bullfight. The weather was fine, and the bullfight was a very good one. Everything seemed vivid and gracious in the brilliant sun, the flags and bunting on the railing of the president's box, the Spanish women with mantillas and flowers, and the matadors performing like golden mannequins with six handsome bulls from the ranches of Don Angel Arisco. Ears were cut, wineskins and bouquets showered the ring, and the band played triumphant music. Beecher saw Lynch in a barrera seat, applauding vigorously, and the Frenchman, Maurice, in the company of an American with a long, cold face.

Afterwards Laura and Beecher returned to his villa to swim. Beecher changed into trunks in his bedroom, and Laura undressed in the thatched summer-house beside the pool. When he started down the garden path, carrying a tray of hot tea and a bottle of rum, he saw that she was already in the water, her blonde head smooth and bright under the soft moonlight.

Beecher put the tray on a table between two reclining chairs. He had no wrap to offer her, but he had brought down towels, and a terrytowelling shirt.

The water was fresh and cleanly cold. Beecher swam several lengths to warm himself, and then let his body rock lazily with the miniature waves surging back and forth across the pool. Finally Laura climbed out and sat in the reclining chair, wet and shining.

Beecher put the towel over her legs and tucked it round her ankles. He poured hot tea, added a splash of rum, and handed her the cup. He saw that her eyes were unhappy. "What's the matter?"

"I don't know. Nothing."

But he knew that her mood had changed. He smiled at her. "Come on, we're friends, remember?"

"Everything seems so unreal here." She turned and looked at him steadily, and he could see the shine of moonlit water in her eyes. "Does Spain do this to everybody?"

"I don't think you can blame poor old Spain." He studied her shadowed face, trying to guess at her thoughts.

Beecher turned as he heard footsteps hurrying down the garden. It was Encarna, her white apron fluttering palely in the darkness. "There is someone to see you, senor," she said, in a disapproving tone. "Senorita Ilse, Don Willie's friend."

"Will you excuse me for just a minute, Laura?"

"Yes, of course."

Beecher put on his wrap and slippers and went up to the villa. Ilse stood by the fireplace in the living-room, with a white leather coat belted tightly about her slender waist, and her thick black hair swinging loosely to her shoulders.

"Hullo, Mike," she said, with a small, quick smile. "You must forgive me for coming here like this."

"Not at all. Sit down."

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" No, please, I'll only stay a moment. I feel foolish. I went to the village for cigarettes, but couldn't find any. So I came up to—what is your word?—sponge, that's it, to sponge some from you."

Beecher smiled. " That's what neighbours are for, Ilse."

" Don Willie will be furious with me," she said. " He thinks it is not prideful to ask for things—to beg, I mean."

" That sounds like Willie."

" Pardon me? "

" Nothing. Will a couple of packets be enough? "

" Yes. You have plans with Don Willie, I hear," she said, as Beecher got cigarettes from a carton on top of the mantelpiece. " Selling stocks and shares, isn't it? "

Beecher was about to tell her he hadn't made up his mind, but he realised that courtesy required him to make his answer directly to Don Willie. " Well, we've been talking about it," he said.

" But isn't it a gamble? You have a good life here."

" But it's a job, and I need one."

" You need a good job." There was a touch of colour in her cheeks now. " This may not be a good job," she said. " When Don Willie talks business, I don't listen too closely. So I know nothing of business. But he is worried about money, I know that."

" Ilse, what are you trying to tell me? What's this about Don Willie having no money? "

" I didn't say that. I said he is worried about money, Mike. He is strong and clever, and he expects other people to be the same." She pressed her fingers to her temples. " He is good, believe me. He is honest and good. But weak people can be hurt by him."

Beecher watched her for a moment. Then he said, " Did it happen to you? "

" We are not talking about me."

Beecher was embarrassed by her intensity, and her apparently neurotic anxieties, and he was relieved when the terrace doors opened and Laura came in.

" It's too cold," she said, hugging her arms about her body. Beecher's terrytowelling shirt hung well above her knees, and her bare feet left narrow footprints on the tiled floor as she crossed quickly to the fireplace.

" You remember Ilse, don't you? " Beecher asked.

" Why, of course. Didn't we meet at the Bar Central or somewhere? " She smiled and put her hands out to the fireplace. " This feels heavenly, Mike." She hadn't glanced at Ilse.

" Ilse was our hostess at Don Willie's party," Beecher said.

" Was she really? " Laura said, smiling. " But there was such a crowd. It was difficult to keep everybody straight."

The exchange had confused Ilse, Beecher could see. Laura's tone had brought colour to her cheeks. " I was not in fact the hostess," she said. " In our villa there is only the host, Don Willie."

" But you have your own special work to do, I'm sure," Laura said lightly.

" Yes, I have a job, as you say."

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"And I'm sure you're excellent at it." Laura looked at Ilse for the first time. "It was so nice meeting you again," she said.

"Thank you." Ilse's body was rigid with embarrassment. "I must go, Mike. Thank you again."

"Don't mention it. I'll be seeing you."

When Ilse had gone, Beecher made a couple of drinks. "You need something to warm you up?" he said to Laura.

"What do you mean by that?"

He shrugged. "You were pretty rough on her."

"Well, how did you expect me to react? I don't have your Bohemian temperament, of course." She took a quick swallow from her drink. "But give me time, and I'll learn."

"What the devil are you talking about? She came up here to borrow some cigarettes."

"At this time of night? Oh, that's good. And without stockings and damn little else underneath that contour raincoat of hers."

Beecher saw with surprise that her anger was real. "Come on now," he said, smiling. "What she's wearing or not wearing doesn't prove much. You're not exactly dressed for chapel, are you?"

"I know." She sat down and pulled the hem of the terry-towelling shirt over her bare knees. "We're sisters under the skin, I suppose. Members in good standing of Beecher's happy harem. Panting for action, all stripped down for the call."

"Shut up!" Beecher said quietly. "We won't talk any more tonight."

"All right, Mike." She stood up very slowly, as if all the buoyant strength had been drained from her body. "I'll get dressed, Mike. I'm sorry."

"I'll send Adela down for your things. You can use my bedroom."

"Thank you."

Without bothering to change, he went out and swung the Citroën round in the narrow parking area in front of his garage. Then he smoked several cigarettes, lighting one from the stub of the other.

Finally he glanced at his watch. Half an hour had gone by.

Flipping away his cigarette, he returned to the villa. The living-room was empty, and from the kitchen he heard the murmured conversation between Adela and Encarna. He walked down the hall to his bedroom. The door was open, and moonlight sliced through the grillework of the window and made a checkerboard pattern on the carpet and bedspread.

Laura was sitting with her back to him on the edge of the bed. She hadn't removed his shirt.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't want to go," she said, whispering the words.

"That's all right." He closed the door behind him and sat beside her. "You don't have to go."

"I'm so ashamed of myself. I'm scared."

"It can't be all that bad," he said, and put his arm tightly about her shoulders.

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" I don't know what's going to happen," she said, and he could feel her tears.

Beecher patted her shoulder gently. " There's a guy at home, I guess."

She nodded quickly. " Will this seem like a dream then? " She tried to laugh, but it was a sad little sound. " Par for a summer vacation in Spain? Or will it be the only thing that matters? I'm terrified, Mike."

" You're too smart for that."

" But don't leave me."

" You're the one who's leaving," he said gently.

" Then I'll stay here."

Beecher thought about it. He ran a hand slowly over her smooth hair. There was no point in pretending they could play house here like innocent little children. He knew the frenetic gossip of the village. And she'd get to know it, too.

" I'm sorry," she said quietly.

" For what? "

She sighed. " I said something wrong, obviously."

" No, but listen to me; how much time have you left? "

" Three weeks."

" Will you spend them in Morocco with me? "

She didn't answer, but he felt the quick nod of her head against his chest.

" We'll go down to Rabat tomorrow night then," he said.

" What do you mean? Are you going to take Don Willie's job? "

" Don't worry about him." Some day, Beecher thought, he would repay Don Willie for the flight. The silly old Prussian might have enough sentiment in him to appreciate playing Cupid's aide-de-camp. But Beecher wanted no part of Don Willie's job in Morocco; that would be just another slice of unreality. He had what he wanted in his arms now. And he didn't intend to let her go.

She turned from him and lay back on his bed.

At half past nine on Monday morning, Beecher phoned Don Willie and told him he would be ready to leave for Rabat that night.

" Good! Good! " Don Willie's voice was a vigorous bray in Beecher's ears. " You need work, Mike. Like the whole world needs it. The plane leaves at half past eleven. Meet me at my villa at eleven."

" Eleven o'clock. I'll be there."

Beecher phoned the agent who had let him the villa and told him he would be giving it up. The simplicity and finality of the decision stimulated him; by that one act he had cut his ties to Spain. Now he was on the wing.

At half past three, he heard a motorcycle coming up the hill to his villa, its engine popping defiantly through the heat and silence

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of the siesta hour. Adela answered the door. In a moment she appeared on the terrace, where Beecher was relaxing with a cup of tea, and announced Don Julio Cansana, the police constable of Miramar. Beecher smiled as Don Julio came briskly through the living-room doors on to the terrace.

"This is a pleasant surprise," Beecher said.

"Thank you, Mike. I hope I'm not disturbing you. But why aren't you resting? You Americans will never learn to take the siesta, I'm afraid."

"Don't worry, I'm sold on it. But I had some work to do. Sit here in the shade."

Don Julio was short and muscular, in his middle sixties, with a strongly seamed brown face, white hair and moustache, and brilliant blue eyes. He wore a grey-green uniform, with red epaulets and shining brass buttons on the front of his trim tunic.

It was generally held that he was too intelligent a man to be running the affairs of a small fishing village, and the inevitable inference was that he must have got into trouble with the present regime at one time or another in his career. But it was difficult to conclude anything definite about his politics or personal philosophy; he delighted in paradox and oblique approaches, and Beecher, for one, was seldom sure which end of a proposition Don Julio might be offering as true or reasonable.

"What did you wish to see me about?" Beecher asked him.

"This, Mike." Don Julio put aside his drink and studied the fine ash on his cigar. "You know the young lady who lives with Don Willie? Ilse Sherman is her name. She is a friend of yours?"

"A casual friend."

"This morning your casual friend came to my office and denounced you as a dealer in contraband."

"What!" Beecher stood up so abruptly that half his drink spilt on to the floor. "Are you serious?"

"Now, Mike! Do you imagine I came here to make jokes?"

"Well, is *she* serious?"

"Quite serious. Whether she believed her own story or not, I can't say. Whether she was lying or not, I can't say. But she was quite serious."

"You know it's not true, don't you? What do you mean, you're not sure she's lying? Of course she's lying." Beecher sat down slowly. "It's so ridiculous, it's funny."

"Well, perhaps we shall all have a good laugh about it in time," Don Julio said with a sigh. "But at the moment I must look into her charges."

"All right." Beecher let out his breath slowly. "What's her story?"

"She came here last night. Is that correct?"

"Yes. She wanted to borrow some cigarettes."

"Very well. You gave them to her?"

"Check. Two packets of Bisontes. She thanked me and left, period."

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" There was no other conversation? "

" Damn it, she was in and out inside a minute or so. You've got my story. What's hers? "

" Simply this. She came here to borrow cigarettes. You were obliging. But you told her that you had contacts in Tangier and Gibraltar who sold you case-lots of whisky and boxed cartons of cigarettes. You told her you had been involved in this business for over two years and could supply her or Don Willie or any of her friends with these articles of contraband at substantial savings." Don Julio crossed his booted ankles. " She has signed her name to these charges, Mike."

" Well, she's a liar. And where do we go from here? Is the burden of proof on me? "

" No, of course not. But I must look into the matter."

" Then let's not waste time. Search the house if you want to. Talk to the maids."

Don Julio smiled at him. " I must confess I didn't believe her story for a moment. Even a policeman has his blind loyalties. But why did she lie to me? This I find disturbing."

" What are you going to do about it? "

" I will have a talk with her," Don Julio said.

" And that's all? "

Don Julio smiled. " I can be quite stern at times."

" Let me be the one to talk to her first," Beecher said.

" Why? " Don Julio appeared puzzled.

" I'll be damned if I know," Beecher said; he was honestly baffled by his own suggestion. " Maybe she does have some grudge against me. Some need to pay me off."

" Well, there are ways of doing such things. Some are quite legal, others aren't. It is my responsibility to impress the distinction on her."

" As a favour, Don Julio. Let me see her first."

" What do you hope to accomplish? "

" I think she'll be in your office within an hour to sign a retraction. Wouldn't that serve your purpose? "

Don Julio shrugged. " Perhaps. But my office isn't something to be used for the solution of personal problems."

" I'm asking you, not your office."

" You will be satisfied with a retraction? "

" If she's an hysteric or a neurotic, why push her over the edge? I'll be satisfied if she withdraws the charge."

" Very well. I'll give you a chance . . ."

The brown-eyed little maid who opened the door of Don Willie's villa told Beecher that the senorita was resting and had left orders not to be disturbed.

Beecher told her to tell the senorita that if she weren't in evidence within sixty seconds he would haul her from her bed by the hair of her head. The maid backed off with a frightened smile.

The door of the living-room opened and Ilse came in. She wore tight black slacks and a white shirt. Her face was drawn and pale.

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Some of his anger dissolved as he watched her attempt to light a cigarette. Finally she gave up and dropped the cigarettes and book of matches on the hearthstone of the fireplace.

"You know why I'm here," he said.

"I'm so ashamed," she said, in a soft, breaking voice. She closed her eyes and ran both hands over her thick black hair. "Please do something, curse me, strike me, anything you like."

Beecher sighed. All of his anger was gone now. "Why did you do it?" he asked her.

"I don't know. I don't know."

"Stop it! I want to know why."

"I was furious with you and that American girl." The words came in a trembling torrent. "You are both so smug and cold, so full of your stupid American superiority. She treated me as if I was one of the sights of the town, the streetwalker tourists take snapshots of to show their friends at home. And is she any better? Walking about your villa half naked? Did she spend the night? And make nice antiseptic American love to you?"

"I'm not here to discuss her," Beecher said. "You know that."

She shook her head quickly. "Forgive me, Mike, please. I shouldn't say such things. I was hurt. I was shamed. She made me feel evil and filthy. I don't even remember going to Don Julio. It was like a nightmare. Can't you understand?"

"You've got to phone him now," Beecher said. "And tell him you were lying."

"Yes, yes, I will do anything."

Beecher stood beside her while she spoke to Don Julio. It wasn't an easy matter, he could see; her words came slowly, halting with embarrassment and shame, and her free hand fluttered nervously at her throat.

When she finished and Don Júlio began to speak, she closed her eyes and squared her shoulders, as if she were expecting a blow. Finally she put the phone down and leaned against the back of a chair. Her eyes were still closed. "He despises me, I know," she said.

Beecher walked to the door, but hesitated with his hand on the knob. She hadn't looked at him, and still leaned wearily against the back of the chair.

"Ilse, look at me."

She turned to him and opened her eyes.

"I understand how you must have felt. And why you did what you did. Most of us don't have our emotions completely under control." He shrugged. "It's part of being human."

She smiled wearily. "You're very kind."

"Look," he said. "You did something foolish, but you admitted it and straightened it out. Now get it out of your mind. Let's go for a drive."

She smiled at him, but it was still an empty and weary effort. "All right, Mike."

They drove up Calle San Miguel to the central plaza, moving

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slowly behind a donkey-drawn cart of olive logs. "I'm going away from Miramar," Ilse said.

"Tired of it?"

"I'm tired of everything. I'm going back to Austria for a while."

"To your home?"

"It is not really a home. My parents are dead. I stay with my sister, who is married to a doctor. They live in a village near the one I was raised in, but village life is the same everywhere."

Beecher noticed the hollows under her eyes, dark against her white skin. "And will you come back here?"

"Oh yes." She sighed faintly. "I will always come back here."

Instead of turning into Calle San Miguel, Beecher drove out on the coast road. The sun was setting, and the mountains were massive slopes of dark gold. Everything was still.

"Relax a bit," he said. "I'll drive out a few miles, then take you home."

Beecher smoked a cigarette and savoured the cool salty breeze on his face as he drove. It was almost dark when he returned to The Black Dove. Ilse climbed quickly from the car and closed the door. "Thank you for everything, Mike," she said, then turned and hurried through the tall iron gates of the villa.

Beecher drove back through Miramar, and up the winding road which led to his villa. He turned on his headlights. Darkness was coming down swiftly; where the mountains had been golden, they were now purple and black, and the shadows were spreading out across the quiet sea. As he swung into the entrance of his villa, the headlights of his car swept over the gardens, and across the narrow gravelled drive which led to his garage.

Beecher hit the brakes with his full strength. His car lurched and skidded to a stop. The body of a man lay in the road.

He turned off the engine with one hand and opened his door with the other, feeling the cold weakness in his stomach, the abrupt and violent stroke of his heart.

He stepped into the headlights and knelt beside the body. The Frenchman was dead, blood staining his face and throat, his streaked, milky eyes staring sightlessly. He had been struck a heavy blow from behind.

Beecher knelt beside him, unable to think for a moment. Eventually his thoughts stopped their giddy whirling. First of all, he must call Don Julio . . . A footstep crunched on the gravel behind him; Beecher started violently.

"Don't turn round," a familiar voice said quietly. "There's a good chap." There was a sound in the soft, cool air, a sense of motion more felt than heard, and all of Beecher's thoughts and fears suddenly fused themselves together in a searing, pain-shot blackness. After that, there was nothing at all.

When Beecher regained consciousness, he was half sitting, half lying in a deep leather chair. His head ached blindingly, and his

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stomach was twisting with nausea. When he swallowed, the saliva in his mouth burnt his throat like lye. In front of him was a desk covered with papers and ledgers and a tray of bottles and glasses.

Someone moved behind him. He tried to turn round, but the effort sharpened the pain in his head unbearably, and he settled back weakly in the chair, labouring for breath.

Don Willie came into his view. He looked down at Beecher with an expression of troubled sympathy. In Beecher's foreshortened view, Don Willie seemed enormous; he wore a white suit, and he looked as big as a barrel, with his head almost touching the wooden beams of the ceiling. He put a hand gently on Beecher's shoulder. "Your head, it is better, no?"

"It hurts," Beecher said, speaking with as little effort as possible; he didn't want to do anything that might rake up the smouldering pain in his head.

"Ach! It is only a little bump. You want a brandy, nothing else."

"Is this your place?"

"Yes, my study." Don Willie smiled about the room, his manner changing somewhat; he became almost jaunty with pride. "It is cosy, no?"

"I wish you'd call Dr. Gonzales," Beecher said.

"Forget your pain. You must have a drink." Don Willie poured brandy into a glass and gave it to Beecher. "Here is your medicine."

Beecher sipped from the glass. The brandy cleaned the hot sick taste from his mouth. He closed his eyes. For a moment he thought he would be sick, but the feeling passed; after a little while he realised that strength was coming back into his arms and legs.

"What about the Frenchman?" he said. "He's dead?"

"Yes, of course," Don Willie said. He paced the floor, breathing heavily. "He is dead. It is better all round, no?"

"How would I know?"

"But of course." Don Willie's smile was embarrassed. "You don't understand. It is not your fault."

The door opened and Lynch came in. "Hullo!" he said, smiling down at Beecher.

Here was the familiar voice! Beecher stared up at him. "You hit me," he said, and he knew his voice was high and unsteady. "Didn't you?"

"Yes, of course, old man. And I'd rather like to apologise. I hope you'll forgive me. Nothing else to do, considering, but still . . ." Lynch smiled charmingly. "Hardly in the best form, was it?"

Don Willie looked anxiously at his wristwatch. "We must leave soon for the airport. I will tell the maids to make sandwiches and coffee. Excuse me." He hurried off, rubbing his hands together nervously.

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Lynch poured himself a drink and sat down in a chair facing Beecher. He got out his cigarettes and crossed his long legs, very casual and correct in cavalry twill trousers, and a hacking jacket with leather patches at the elbows.

"How're you feeling, old man?"

"I want to know about the Frenchman," Beecher said.

Lynch paused in the act of lighting a cigarette; the flame of the match flickered in his eyes, and made a golden spark in his fair hair. "Well, I killed him, of course," he said, and lit his cigarette, dropping the burnt match in an ash-tray. "Messy, I grant you, but unavoidable."

"Why did you kill him?"

Lynch sighed. "It's a complicated business. Supposing I try to clue you in from the start. The Frenchman, you see, was hired by Don Willie to do a job. But it became apparent he wasn't up to it." Lynch smiled as he pointed his cigarette at Beecher. "You seemed much more the type. Steady, dependable, all that sort of thing. Poor old Maurice felt he'd been done dirty. Blamed you for losing his golden opportunity."

"That job in Rabat—" Beecher said slowly—"is that what the Frenchman wanted?"

"There's no sense hopping back and forth this way. Let's proceed in a straightforward fashion. Now where was I?" Lynch took a thoughtful sip from his drink.

"Oh yes. Well, Maurice went up to your villa tonight. I

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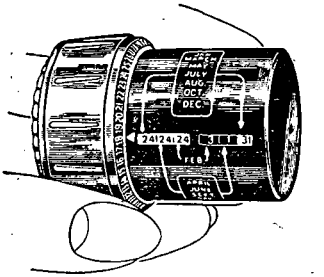

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tagged along to talk some sense into him. But it was quite hopeless. He planned to kill you." Lynch shook his head. "Frightfully unstable fellow. Thought that would make Don Willie reconsider, give him another chance, and so forth. Well, I couldn't have him killing you." Lynch put out his cigarette with a strong twist of his wrist.

"So I killed him. Then you drove up. I couldn't let you call the police, so I tapped you on the head, slung you into your car, and popped back here."

"What will you tell the police when they arrive?"

"I tucked poor old Maurice behind those bushes along your front wall. A dog might sniff him out, but your maids won't find him till morning. We'll be gone by then."

Beecher managed to work himself up to a sitting position. "You assume we're flying off to Rabat on schedule? With a dead man lying in my garden?"

"We're not going to Rabat," Lynch said mildly. "In your useful American phrase, we intend to hijack that plane."

"Are you out of your mind?"

"I know this is all something of a surprise to you," Lynch said. "I'd suggest you let me finish. The job Don Willie offered you in Rabat doesn't exist."

"Why did Don Willie offer me a nonexistent job in Rabat?" Beecher said, rubbing his forehead. Lynch's words seemed to be drifting to him through a fog of absurd confusion; they made hardly any sense at all.

"To get you on the plane." Lynch grinned amiably. "You're going to fly it for us, Beecher."

"So I'm going to fly the plane," he said.

"Yes. It's an old trustworthy C-47. Shouldn't present any problems."

"Oh no. They're sound ships." Beecher felt as if he were humouring an idiot. "But why did you pick me?"

"Backs to the wall, that sort of thing. The Frenchman was originally hired to pilot the aircraft. Don Willie knew him years ago in France, where Maurice was sucking up to the Vichy crowd. He'd been a first-class pilot in his time. And he needed money, so it seemed a good idea to bring him down here for the job. But one look at him, and we saw it was hopeless. The beggar couldn't keep a drink straight in his hands, let alone a control stick.

"It was common knowledge you'd been a pilot. We decided you might do." Lynch smiled easily. "We couldn't make you a straightforward proposition. No telling how you'd react."

"What's your job in this business?"

"Navigator. I'll point out the route."

"Where did you intend to take the plane?"

"That's a little complicated. But it's not necessary to go into it just now."

Beecher straightened himself in the chair with an effort; a current of anxiety was running through him. "But there'll be

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other passengers on that flight to Rabat. An American girl for one. What do you propose to do with them?"

"You needn't concern yourself about that. You've got nothing to do but fly the aircraft."

The door opened and Don Willie came in. Lynch said casually, "I've explained the drill to Beecher. But he doesn't seem to think I'm serious. Perhaps you'd better have a go at it. It's now ten o'clock. We should be leaving here in approximately forty-five minutes."

Don Willie turned to Beecher, an anxious smile flickering over his damp red face. "You know I am a serious man, Mike. I love to joke sometimes, too. With my friends I joke. But I am not joking now. You must believe me." Don Willie pulled a chair close and patted Beecher's shoulder clumsily. "I must take that aeroplane away tonight. It cannot go to Rabat. No one will be hurt. It is all planned. But I must take it. Otherwise I am destroyed."

Beecher could smell the rank sweat of fear on the man and see the glint of desperation in his deep-set little eyes. "I am in danger. Long ago, many years ago—"

He shook his head and a soft cry of despair sounded in his throat. "Ach! How can I make you understand! Years ago my company did work in Spanish Morocco, near Tetuan—roads, bridges, irrigation. We had a contract with the Spanish government, but the money came from Morocco. Spain was in control of Morocco. Spain made the decision on what was needed, and the Moroccans paid for it with taxes. The bids were very low. But the specifications were very high. I was caught in the middle. I could not do all the work that was contracted for."

"And paid for?" Beecher asked.

Don Willie laughed loudly and mopped his forehead with a handkerchief. "You have the American head for business, no? You understand now? It was business, nothing more. The Moroccans are savages. They don't need roads and bridges and irrigation schemes. Here in Spain was serious work to be done. Hospitals, office buildings, housing developments—should I stop this to give a trickle of water to savages? I tried to do what was best for everybody. I took—what is your word?" He frowned anxiously. "I took short cuts . . .

"But now, Mike, there is no more Spanish Morocco. The Moroccans run their own country. And in Rabat, their government is looking into all these old contracts with Spain. They have asked to see the bids, the specifications, invoices, receipts, all these things. They will find the short cuts I took years ago. Everything I have accomplished will be destroyed. But I don't care for myself. It is the good name of Germans everywhere that is threatened."

The curious logic made Beecher's head ache. "And this information, it's on tonight's flight to Rabat?"

"Yes, yes. I have knowed—known—of this inquiry for months.

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I have a friend in Madrid, many friends. The papers, dozens of boxes of them, are being flown to Miramar by a military plane, then transferred to the commercial flight to Rabat. Many friends of mine will be destroyed if the information gets to Rabat. And Germans the world over . . ."

"That's a very decent sentiment," Lynch said to Don Willie, "but the point is, Beecher, we're going to put that plane down where it will never be found, and destroy their evidence."

Don Willie turned entreatingly to Beecher. "You must fly the plane for me."

"Go to hell!" Beecher said, spacing the words deliberately. "You've killed a man tonight. For Germany's sake, I suppose. And you damn near killed me. I'm not saving your hide."

Don Willie snatched up a crop from his desk and slashed at Beecher's face. "You will obey me!" he cried hysterically. The crop rose again in his huge fist, and Beecher threw up his arms to block the blow. A hot, savage pain flamed on his wrists. He slid from the chair, too weak to stand and fight.

"Don't use that bloody whip any more," Lynch said to Don Willie.

"He must obey."

"You'll get damn little obedience from a corpse. Let's try another tack. Just hold on a minute." Lynch went to the door and opened it. "Laura?" he called sharply. "Come in here."

Beecher raised his head slowly. He felt the heavy, protesting lurch of his heart, and the tight knots of pain burning in his arms and shoulders.

Laura came into the room. He heard her murmur hullo to Don Willie. She sat in a deep chair and crossed her legs. Lynch strolled to her side and put a hand lightly on her shoulder.

"Please talk to the bloody fool," he said.

"What shall I say?"

Lynch shrugged. "What does a woman say in these circumstances? Something kind, I expect. Promise him a nice sisterly kiss on the cheek if he behaves."

Beecher couldn't raise his head; he couldn't look into her eyes. Something was shrivelling and dying inside him, filling him with intolerable pain.

"Are you in this?" he said, in a soft, anguished voice.

"Yes, I'm in it," she said.

He couldn't lift his eyes to her face. Kneeling at her feet, his head swinging slowly with pain and despair, Beecher heard the German's heavy breathing and the strike of a match as Lynch lit a cigarette, and a whispering silken sound as Laura twisted in the chair and crossed her legs.

"Why?" he whispered, still unable to raise his head.

"Jimmy Lynch needed me."

"But you told me—" he wet his lips—"you knew my sister." Beecher, desperate, saw a ray of hope. "You're lying. They're making you lie."

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Lynch cleared his throat. "Now, old man, you'd best be realistic. When the Frenchman let us down, you were our only hope. We pinched a few letters addressed to you in the Bar Central. They were from your sister with the cute name, Bunny. You and Willie weren't friends, so we had to bring you together casually. We put Laura in to bat. She had been waiting for me up the coast at Estepona. It seemed wiser to keep well apart until we got on the Rabat flight.

"It was her idea, as a matter of fact, that you might be a bit homesick for an American girl. And she did a jolly good job, I must say. If it weren't for the bloody Frenchman, it would be sunny skies all the way home."

"It was all a fake?" Beecher said. He couldn't think or feel any more; he knew nothing but a dumb, blind pain.

"That's right," she said quietly. "But I'm sorry it went as far as it did."

Beecher worked himself up to his knees slowly and painfully. They watched his progress with varying expressions and reactions: Don Willie's face was flushed and swollen, as if he were hardly daring to breathe; Lynch was smiling around the smoke curling up from his cigarette, but his eyes had narrowed down to bright, anxious points of light; and Laura was smiling, too, but pleasantly and casually, as if she were waiting for his answer to a polite and gracious question.

Lynch took a gun from his pocket and pointed it at Beecher's head. "You're playing the fool," he said quietly. "You'll die here on your knees if you don't do what you're told."

Beecher didn't want to die; he wanted to live and destroy them. Somehow he would do that. "All right, I'll fly your kite," he said.

He saw them grinning at one another, saw their anxiety dissolving into relief and confidence.

"I knowed—I knew—you would help us," Don Willie said.

"I'd better get cleaned up," Beecher said. "I feel filthy."

"I'll show you to the lavatory," Lynch said, gesturing with the gun. "We'll be sticking close together now, Beecher."

The cockpit of the C-47 was dimly lighted from the glare of the instrument panels. Beecher flew at six thousand feet, on a course which was taking them south and west from Miramar. Unless Lynch gave him another bearing, they would be over Gibraltar within fifteen minutes. Beecher sat at the chief pilot's column, adjusting the trim of the plane and checking his instruments. He was flying from memory and intuition, but already he had formed an estimate of the plane; the data from the instrument panel and the feel of the controls had given him an index to its present and potential performance.

Laura sat beside him at the co-pilot's column. He could see the shine of her blonde head in the windshield, and the triangle of white flesh below her throat. The gun in her hand wasn't reflected in the windshield; she was holding it casually in her lap.

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" You do this very well," she said.

He didn't answer; he couldn't trust himself to talk to her yet.

There had been no trouble at the airport in Miramar. Driving there, Lynch had kept his gun at Beecher's side. " You'll stick to me like glue, old man," he said. " Laura will take care of the passports and tickets. The plane from Madrid landed an hour or so ago. It's transferred its load to the commercial flight, and is halfway home by now. But there'll be a delay. Don Willie booked all the seats on the Rabat flight. That was done in Seville. Naturally these bookings won't show up. We'll have the plane to ourselves. But the airport is likely to hold up the flight a bit for them. We'll wait politely and patiently. Do you understand? "

After a fifteen-minute delay, which had been caused by Don Willie's phoney bookings, they boarded the plane. The Iberia clerks were concerned at first but, as the seconds ticked away, they called the flight and prepared to go home.

Beecher had taken an outside seat at Lynch's order, and Laura had sat behind him with the gun at the back of his head. Five minutes after they were airborne, Lynch had walked forward and jerked open the door to the pilot's compartment. He reappeared seconds later herding the pilot and co-pilot before him, the gun in his hand whipping back and forth between them like some small animal.

" Get up there, double quick! " Lynch had jerked his head at Beecher.

That had been twenty-five minutes ago. Now they were about sixty miles south-west of Miramar and nearing La Linea, the border station between Spain and Gibraltar. He couldn't see the coastal ridge of mountains or the sea a mile below him; beyond the soft glare of the instrument panel there was only blackness.

Laura struck a match to her cigarette, and he saw her expression clearly in the leaping flame; her features were composed and serene.

" Who the hell are you? " he said. " What's your real name? "

" Laura Meadows. That much is right. But I'm Canadian, not American. I was afraid you'd guess that."

He wanted to look at her, but he couldn't. " Why the hell did you do this? " he said bitterly.

" Because Jimmy asked me to."

" Did he tell you to climb into the sack with me? "

" I don't imagine he thought that would be necessary."

" He left the decision to you? "

" Of course." She smiled. " He trusts me."

" How long have you known him? "

" Jimmy? Four years."

" And they were good years, I imagine."

" Hardly that. You don't know him. He's usually taken for a gentleman, and that always got him into trouble. In England especially, where people are impressed if you speak properly." She sighed humorously. " Banks are impressed, too."

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Beecher found he could talk about Lynch. That was easy. " Was that how he got his exercise? Bouncing cheques? "

" No. There were other things. He doesn't give a damn about anything or anybody. He likes making a mess and hurting people."

Beecher looked at her. " That's his attraction for you? "

" Don't be ugly," she said sharply.

Beecher smiled at his reflection in the mirror; it wasn't a pleasant smile, it was the reaction of a fighter who'd drawn blood. " I haven't started getting ugly."

" You're afraid of too many things to be dangerous," she said, with a little smile.

The plane lurched suddenly and sickeningly then, the port wing dipping at thirty degrees. Beecher slammed his foot against the left rudder and fought the control column; he thought at first an aileron had been blown out of function but the plane steadied after a few wild seconds and resumed its normal steady pattern of flight.

" You try anything funny and Jimmy will have your hide," she said.

He was startled by the raw anger in her voice. He turned and saw the tension in her face. And he realised then that it wasn't anger he had heard, but fear.

Beecher smiled and turned back to the controls. " You said I'm too scared to be dangerous, remember? "

The door opened a moment or so later and Lynch came into the cockpit. He had changed into faded khaki dungarees and a brown sweater. The gun hung in his hand. " On target, I see," he said, glancing over Beecher's shoulder at the compass. " Well and good. You get some sleep now," he said to Laura. " Beecher and I have to mull over the navigational drill."

When Laura had gone, Lynch sat down at the co-pilot's column and flipped open a sturdily-bound book of navigation charts. He put the gun in his lap, took a pencil from the upper breast pocket of his overalls. " First of all, drop down to about five hundred feet now," he said. " We don't want the radar at Gib to pick us up. At that altitude, they won't have much chance."

Beecher pushed the control column forward and watched the air-speed and altitude indicators. " Where do we go then? "

" I'll give you another bearing presently," Lynch said, making a pencil mark in his chart book. " Now listen to me carefully, Beecher. I can't fly a plane, but I know a good bit about the mechanical side of it. Don't get ideas about faking engine trouble. I've locked up the Spanish pilots in the luggage compartment. But I can haul them back if you're stupid enough to give me any trouble. Do you understand? "

" Why didn't you use the Spanish pilots in the first place? "

" We thought of that, of course. Stick a gun in their backs and tell them to follow orders. I don't speak their lingo, but we would have put them to work, I can promise you, if you hadn't decided to be pleasant and sensible. We've got some tricky flying to do in the next few hours. You're a safe bet."

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Beecher checked his instruments. They were almost at five hundred feet, and he could see the string of lights gleaming at the base of Gibraltar. They were flying south of the rock; their course would take them over Tangier.

"Did you knock the radios out?" he asked Lynch.

"Yes, of course. Short-circuited the inverters." Lynch's small smile was reflected in the windshield. "I imagined you'd be lonely up here, and I didn't want you passing time by chatting to any stations on the ground."

With Tangier behind them, they headed out to sea. Lynch checked his charts again, and gave Beecher a bearing on a southern course.

He settled back comfortably and lit a cigarette.

"Nothing to do for a couple of hours," he said. "Put her on automatic if you like. I'll get the coffee and sandwiches."

They flew in silence through the darkness. Lynch poured coffee and gave Beecher a sandwich. They were low enough to see the metallic shine of water beneath them and, on their left, the heavy shadows of the Moroccan coast. Finally they saw brilliant lights spreading from the water's edge into the plains beyond the shoreline.

"Casablanca?" Beecher asked.

"I expect it is," Lynch said. "Don't stray any closer to the coast."

"You've got to go inland eventually," Beecher said, glancing at the fuel gauge.

"You fly the plane. I'll tell you where."

In an hour or so they came to another crescent of lights. Beecher tried to remember the features of the Moroccan coast. He had made several fishing trips down here with the Irishman. This was probably Agadir on their left. Lynch gave him a bearing which brought them south and east of the city, on an inland course. Beecher made a guess at their destination: Tiznit perhaps, or Goulimine. They had to go down pretty soon.

Lynch was bent over his chart. He gave Beecher a bearing.

"Our final objective is less than an hour away," he said. "We're aiming at a half-mile square of black shale, ninety miles south of Goulimine. Don Willie said we couldn't miss it."

"But he's on the ground. How did you get mixed up with him?"

"I met him in Spain five years ago. He'd given some work to a friend of mine, so I looked him up. But his operations must have been temporarily respectable. I didn't fit into his plans."

"You're sure you can trust him?"

"Quite sure."

"Honour among thieves?"

"Hardly that. Expediency is the word. There's nothing to be gained by informing."

Fifty miles south of Goulimine, Beecher saw streaks of dawn in the sky. The light was almost imperceptible, a hazy insubstantial

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glimmer against the darkness, seemingly without source or direction. But in a few minutes the sun was spreading along the horizon, and he could make out the features of the hard dry land-skimming below him.

Beecher looked down as they flew, automatically noting the terrain and filing it for a future orientation. There was a sparkle of water through the trees, gleaming against the desert drabness like a diamond on a background of grey velvet. The trees enclosed three sides of a bowl-shaped depression. The area round the mouth of the tiny oasis looked smooth from the air, and Beecher automatically marked it as a possible spot to land.

Lynch was sitting forward, his eyes narrowing as he peered through the windshield. " I believe we've done it, old man," he said in a soft, incredulous voice. " Look there! About a degree or so to your left. Can you make out a layer of black rock? "

Beecher nodded. From this distance the expanse of black shale looked about the size of a playing-card against the grey expanse of desert.

Lynch was grinning with relief.

" We've done it, old chap. Pinched a plane as easily as scrumping an apple from an orchard."

Beecher brought the plane down to within fifty feet of the skimming black shale.

" Put her down," Lynch said.

Beecher reduced his air-speed with the flaps, then moved the control column forward; he landed smoothly, and taxied to a stop. When he cut the motors, the silence settled about them with a sense of weary finality.

The rim of the sun hadn't yet appeared on the horizon, but the eastern skies blazed with golden light. Beecher saw a tiny black dot moving towards them over the smooth shale. It was a truck of some sort.

" You sit here quietly," Lynch said, gesturing casually with his gun. " Laura will be just beyond the door of this compartment. Don't do anything to alarm her, will you? It might give her a turn to have to shoot you."

He stooped to go through the doorway, kicking the door shut with a negligent swing of his foot.

The truck by then had pulled up to stop in front of the plane. It was a stout and powerful Land-Rover riding on wide, deeply-grooved tyres. There were a dozen jerry-cans of water belted into racks along its sides, and six extra tyres were strapped into a metal frame on top of the truck.

Beecher stood and looked out through the windshield of the cockpit. Don Willie was climbing from the driver's seat of the Land-Rover. Bruno, his pilot, looking sleepy and irritable, jumped down from the other side, and disappeared towards the tail of the plane.

Don Willie looked up and smiled quickly at Beecher. He wore a leather flying-jacket and a yellow scarf at his throat. It was obvious

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that he was in the best of spirits: his face was flushed and triumphant. He waved and shouted something at Beecher, then hurried after Bruno.

In a moment or so Lynch appeared, carrying a wooden crate in his arms. He hoisted it on to the tailgate of the truck and returned to the plane. Then Don Willie and Bruno came into view carrying similar crates.

Beecher sat down wearily at the control column. It was all going according to plan. Don Willie must have flown here, Beecher realised, although he saw no plane on the crescent of horizon visible from the cockpit. He might have landed miles away. Bruno must have driven the Land-Rover out from Gouli-mine to meet him. It seemed incredible that such a confused mixture of plans and possibilities and personalities should mesh so efficiently.

The transfer of crates was completed quickly; Bruno was strapping the tailgate back into place. Laura appeared, wearing snugly-fitting overalls which were strapped and buckled at the waist and ankles. She climbed quickly into the Land-Rover and settled herself in the middle of the front seat. Bruno came round from the rear of the truck and got behind the wheel.

Beecher's mouth was suddenly dry.

Lynch and Don Willie came into view. Don Willie put a foot on the running-board and frowned at the pure white sky. He spoke to Lynch without turning his head. Lynch shrugged and took the gun from the pocket of his overalls. It was an automatic, a .38, Beecher guessed.

Beecher felt cold blisters of sweat breaking on his forehead. Lynch had walked out of his sight. Don Willie had hoisted himself into the truck beside Laura.

Footsteps sounded in the aisle, and Beecher trembled with the sudden fearful thrust of his heart. He knew that he'd been a fool to wait; with the plane in his hands he might at least have crashed them into the ground. But they were safe now, their feet solidly on the ground, and he was caught like a rabbit in a noose.

Beecher leapt from the pilot's column and threw himself at the slowly-opening door. His weight slammed it shut, and he heard Lynch's harsh, startled oath when he rammed home the bolt on the inside of the door.

The knob twisted rapidly back and forth, then Lynch's fist hammered against the metal panel of the door. "Open up, I say! Don't be a bloody fool."

Beecher flattened his back against the wall beside the doorway, well out of range if Lynch fired through the panel. He felt a desperate excitement running through him; there was a chance, after all. If he could persuade Lynch to leave the plane to talk to Don Willie, he could use the controls without risking a bullet in his back. Then he could start the engines and whip the tail of the plane round against the truck . . .

But Lynch said, "You're in no position to bargain, old man."

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His voice was casual and patient, as if he were humouring a child. " We've chocked stones up against the wheels. You can't move the plane, you know."

" How much time have you got to spare? " Beecher shouted at Lynch.

Lynch didn't answer. His footsteps moved rapidly towards the rear of the plane. Beecher turned back to the window. Don Willie had opened the door of the truck, and was standing on the running-board looking anxiously towards the plane. Lynch had apparently appeared in the doorway, for Don Willie began to shout and gesture furiously at his wristwatch. Then he jumped to the ground and strode angrily towards Lynch, moving from Beecher's view.

He heard nothing for a moment. Then Lynch called to him, " Are you coming out, old man? "

" Go to hell! "

Everything was still. Then Beecher stiffened suddenly; a faint crackling noise sounded beyond the door.

" You'd better come out, old man." Lynch's voice was distant. " I've started a fire . . ."

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The last part of Seven Lies South, by William P. McGivern, appears in next month's Argosy on sale May 10

ANSWERS to THINK TWICE on page 70

1. *None. Monkeys can't say anything.*
2. *Because nineteen hundred and one threepenny pieces will always be worth almost twenty-four pounds.*
3. *Yesterday, today, tomorrow.*
4. *Her grandfather is her mother's father.*
5. *No miles, because* these *sheep are already facing each other.*
6. *" The number of words in the sentence you are reading now is not thirteen! " (This is the opposite of the original, as it negates it, and is true because there are now fourteen words in it.)*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 160

Across. 1, *Black.* 4, *Scot-free.* 10, *Squelch.* 11, *Annuals.* 12, *Grip.* 13, *Obese.* 14, *Mice.* 17, *Regular soldier.* 19, *Mermaids' charms.* 22, *Ruin.* 23, *Again.* 24, *Waif.* 27, *Warfare.* 28, *Unspell.* 29, *Namesake.* 30, *Rusty.*

Down. 1, *Best girl.* 2, *Amusing.* 3, *Kill.* 5, *Class-conscious.* 6, *Tend.* 7, *Realise.* 8, *Elsie.* 9, *The burning deck.* 15, *Plums.* 16, *Idaho.* 18, *Usefully.* 20, *Epigram.* 21, *Reapers.* 22, *Rowan.* 25, *Pans.* 26, *User.*

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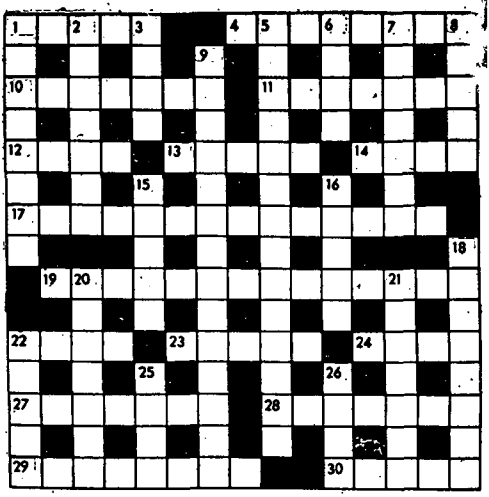
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

Solution on page 159



Across

1 Bess or Maria or Beauty (5).

4 Jock liberated? Completely, too ! (4-4).

10 Rebuff sounds sticky (7).

11 Gardening periodicals ? (7).

12 Case of Barnaby's raven (4).

13 Fat, but largely decorated (5).

14 Of them and men (4).

17 Has he never missed parade ? (7, 7).

19 Sirens' songs, maybe (8, 6).

22 Doom of headless bruin (4).

23 Find repeatedly in Aga (5).

24 Associated with stray (4).

27 Rationing ? Well, it leads to it (7).

28 Remove 19, perhaps (7).

29 Similarly named and leads to a drink (8).

30 Try us—we're stiff (5).

Down

1 Sweetheart or Beauty Queen ? (4, 4).

2 But not to Queen Victoria (7).

3 Murder in skilled manner (4).

5 Good form ? No, snobbish (5-9).

6 Tenpenny nurse (4).

7 Convert to Spanish currency ? (7).

8 Nor is the girl in Hamlet's home (5).

9 Whence all but the boy had fled (3, 7, 4).

15 Good jobs in the fruit trade ? (5).

16 Ho, Brighton Rock girl in fine state (5).

18 As suited to needs of 26 (8).

20 I ram peg with witty phrase (7).

21 They're pretty cutting—Wordsworth heard one (7).

22 Tree in hedgerow and wood (5).

25 Snap up utensils (4).

26 Employer, but not the boss (4).

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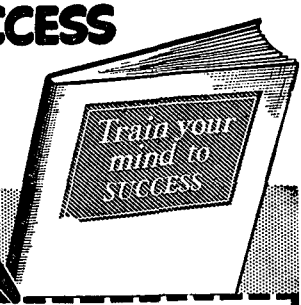

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